

## Intertext

---

Volume 3  
Issue 1 *Spring 1995*

---

Article 1

1995

### Complete Issue, Intertext Volume 3

Follow this and additional works at: <https://surface.syr.edu/intertext>



Part of the [Education Commons](#), and the [Nonfiction Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

(1995) "Complete Issue, Intertext Volume 3," *Intertext*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 1.  
Available at: <https://surface.syr.edu/intertext/vol3/iss1/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Intertext by an authorized editor of SURFACE. For more information, please contact [surface@syr.edu](mailto:surface@syr.edu).

# INTERTEXT

Volume III, Issue 1, spring 1995

---

[preface](#) || [contents](#) || [contributors](#) || [editors](#)

---

A student publication of the Syracuse University Writing Program

**Editors**

Amye Hommel  
Jonathan B. Shablak  
Deborah R. Silver  
Stephanie R. Stevenson  
Debra Yelen

**Copy Editor**

Allison Rao

**Faculty Coordinator**

Jeanette Jeneault

**Technical Support**

George Rhinehart  
Henry Jankiewicz

**Special Thanks**

Susan Cronin  
Nance Hahn  
Helga Lindberg  
Karen Notcher  
Louise Phelps

This magazine features the work of writing studio students, and represents both the quality and the variety of writing produced in The Writing Program's undergraduate studios. It is the mission of this publication to further the primary goal of the program, to produce critically engaged writers within the academic writing community.

The title refers to the interconnectedness and interdependence of all texts. Intertext, therefore, emphasizes the view that essays speak of and to one another, especially within a community context. The Writing Program is a vital, productive community in the process of many conversations, and each issue will contain glimpses into some of these.

Intertext is published semi-annually. All published authors will additionally be considered for the Louise Wetherbee Phelps Writing Awards, to be announced each spring. All submissions of work originally produced for a writing studio will be given serious consideration for publication. Submissions must include the writer's telephone number and address. If a return is desired, the submission must be accompanied by a SASE with appropriate postage. Submissions may be turned in to Room #7 HBC. Copyright reverts to the author.

Letters to the Editor will also be accepted, taking into consideration space available and balance of representative content. All letters must include the name, address and telephone number of the writer in order to be considered for inclusion.

É

## preface

Travels Through The Mind. . . A journey. . . guided by the creative thoughts of the writer. This voyage involves a process by which the readers experience the inner workings of the author's mind. The writers' journeys allow the readers to envision places and ideas that they may never have considered. This creates atmospheres of pleasures, colors, and images within the readers' minds. Each of the pieces included in the Spring 1995 /Intertext/ lead the reader on a voyage like no other, allowing them to discover realms unknown. Every journey, a travel through the mind.

---

### The Writing Program

announces the third annual

### Louise Wetherbee Phelps Writing Awards

to recognize excellence in the Writing Studios

---

### Submissions must

- \* demonstrate depth and complexity of thought, as well as technical control,
- \* fully engage the reader, intellectually and/or emotionally,
- \* exemplify the Writing Program's goals for writers at different studio levels, as discussed in the Studio Sourcebook: A Student's Guide,
- \* have been originally written for a Writing Program Studio and have been accepted for publication by the [been accepted for publication by the editors of Intertext.]

---

There will be two awards - one for lower division and one for upper division--of \$50 each.

# Travels Through The Mind

Intertext; Volume III, issue 1; spring 1995

## contents

- **You Can't Have a Cigarette in Elvis' Bedroom**  
by Benjamin Blacker
  - **The Black Family Structure: A Viable Structure or a Myth?**  
by Elaine I. Sylvester
    - **Queen Anne's Lace**  
by Patricia Z. Cowden  
**(LWP Award Lower Division)**
    - **One Young Dog**  
by Sam Szuck  
**(LWP Award Upper Division)**
      - **Ethics in the Field of Public Communications**  
by Amy Appleby
        - **Generation What? An Outcast of Generation X**  
by Amye Hommel
          - **Refuge**  
by Amy Meadows
            - **Interpersonal Communication and the Internet: The Cyberspace World of Net Relationships**  
by Cheryl Stafford  
**(LWP Award Lower Division)**

# You Can't Have a Cigarette in Elvis's Bedroom

Benjamin Blacker

*To tell the truth, I had never heard of an "ethnography." I balked at this assignment. Go somewhere, somewhere populated by a certain prototype of people, and write about what they're thinking. This is difficult for someone whose one regret in life is that he isn't someone else. And so, after hours upon hours of sitting at my desk staring at a blank sheet of paper, drops of blood forming on my forehead, I left for my Thanksgiving break where I went to, of all places, Memphis, Tenn. The following "ethnography" is the result of that experience.*

And my traveling companions  
Are ghosts and empty sockets  
I'm looking at ghosts and empties. . .  
Paul Simon

As you follow Rita, your tour-guide, into *his* bedroom, you wonder who the hell these people are. Who are these throngs and masses, huddled together in a dead rock star's bedroom, his gold bedposts reflecting in a man's glasses and refracting the overhead chandelier's light into beams over the giddy crowd? Then you realize it doesn't matter who they are. They are here. And they are here for him. For the King.

You made it this far, didn't you? All the way from Syracuse, Greyhounding it to Boston, then all the way to Memphis for Thanksgiving with some family you hardly know. They suggested you go visit Graceland. So you do. And here you are, packed into the King's bedroom with about twenty strangers from all walks of life. Who comes to Graceland the day after Thanks giving? Besides you. Because *you* have an excuse, right? Of course, you *always* have an excuse. There's nothing for a person to do in Memphis if he doesn't marry his cousin. Whatever the situation, you have an excuse. You'll hand the paper in later, or just impro vise. The Red Headed Girl probably doesn't want to talk to you anyway. Get on with your life, you tell yourself. Paul Simon said he has reason to believe we all will be received at Graceland. So what're you waiting for? Nothing. Drown yourself in a rich musi cal tradition.

There is a fat woman in tight black stretch-pants and a purple sweatshirt trying to hop the felt rope that surrounds his bed. "Hop" is being generous. It's more of a clumsy lurch. She wears dark sunglasses, even inside the mansion. There are sparkles around them. She is obviously a fanatic. You are reminded of *Needful Things*, that Stephen King book, in which the woman's fantasy of the King brings her to screaming orgasm. You wonder if this woman is up nights thinking about

him. Does she imagine his gyrating pelvis, too racy for the *Ed Sullivan Show*? Can she hear his deep Memphis drawl? Does he twitch that lip and slyly entice her in her dreams? Rita politely asks the woman to not cross the rope barrier, please. The woman in the tight stretch-pants backs down in a huff, flipping her stubby middle finger at Rita's turned back and staring dag gers at the tour-guide.

The man in the thick glasses is talking in a low voice into a Dictaphone. He holds it right up to his mouth, so you can barely see his lips moving. You move in closer, straining what you always considered your somewhat super-hearing to its limits, attempt ing to discern some intelligible speech. Is he a re porter? Maybe a terrorist, taking verbal notes of this national treasure, someday hoping to plant a bomb in the King's bathtub.

Suddenly, out of the blue, your thoughts turn to Carrie, maybe back in Boston for the holiday. Posi tively back home for the holiday. You haven't spoken to her since she left for Cornell. You e-mailed her once, but there was no reply. Last time you had gotten together you had gotten along so well. There was the bud of a friendship there. Why do you think of her now? Here, of all places? Did Carrie like "Hound Dog" or "Love Me Tender?" You might never know.

You're jerked back to consciousness by someone bumping into you. What the hell? Is one of these dumb hicks so *involved* in his musical deity that he can't watch where the hell he's going? Look, you like the King as much as the next guy, as long as the next guy isn't one of these corn-growing, horse-shoe-throw ing, tractor-towing, field-hoeing, sister-marrying, pitchfork-carrying, bible-thumping, goat-humping, moonshine-drunken, test-flunking, spelunking, eye -sunken, hunken mass of glue sniffing, cow-tipping, tobacco-spitting, drool-dripping, jerky-licking, but ter-churning, cross-burning, windmill-turning, Mount Vernon, chaw-chewing, beer-brewing, UFO-sighting, cock-fighting, grits-biting, wife-harming, always -farming, never-charming, swine-slaughtering, metal -soldering, inbred-daughtering, Welcome-Back-Kottering, wife-branding, power-sanding, back-hand ing, date-inflating, masturbating, sibling-mating, ge netic-mutating, freak-creating, pelvis-gyrating, teeth -missing, cousin-kissing, beer-pissing, homeboy-dissing, wife-bruising, RV-cruising, Civil-War-losing *Deliverance* types. But it isn't.

Instead of the buck-toothed bumpkin you had expected, there is a young woman, a girl really, no older than you. She is blond. But not too blond. Her eyes are hidden behind the klunky contraption of her Kodak, and the flash goes off in your eyes as she turns around to face you.

"Oh, sorry," she says.

"That's all right," you say.

"*Say something else!*", a voice in your head screams. Talk to her!

But you don't, and she slips away into the crowd. You look again, but she's become one of them, and you don't see her any more.

You mope around for the rest of the tour, dragging your feet and following the group half-heartedly. Rita discusses the King's relationship with Priscilla. You listen with a restless ear and let your gaze fall around the room. You don't linger on anything in particular, just a wandering sweep. Nothing important. Nameless, faceless people, ears perked at Rita's every syllable. You want a cigarette. But you quit three weeks ago, and if you have one now. . . Not that you *could*. No, not in the King's bedroom.

But didn't *he*? You can just see him lighting up after a steamy evening with the wife. Maybe it was the one that would eventually herald the arrival of little Lisa Marie. And what about *that*? For some reason you can't picture a young Mrs. Michael Jackson charging the halls of Graceland, clutching her teddy-bear in one hand and maybe her father's guitar pick in the other. Or maybe her father's hand in the other. Was he a family man? You like to think so. Would he bring back souvenirs for his daughter from his various tours? Would she barrel down the sprawling lawn of Graceland, arms outstretched, as he arrived home from a gig in Vegas or LA? Would he hold her, read her stories until she fell asleep? Did he sing lullabies to her in a voice meant for Christian gospel but bastardized for Rock-and-Roll?

Again you are snapped back to consciousness. A tap on your shoulder. Who? *Her*. The blond-but-not-too-blond. She's back. But why?

"Yes?" you ask, immediately suspicious. Why are you so paranoid?

"Listen, Ah hate to ask. . . ." Hm, slight Southern tint to that dripping honey voice. Green eyes. Marvelous. You shake your head, anything she wants. "Would you mind taking my picture in front of that painting. I told my boyfriend"

The world comes screeching to a halt. The earth spins on its axis as you try not to do a double-take. You are afraid that your interior grin has leaked out. Apparently you're right.

"Is something wrong?" she asks.

You blink and look back into her eyes. "No," you assure her. Silence. "Er, the picture?" you manage.

"Oh, right, thanks."

She backs up until she's almost against the wall and you snap the picture. Then another one, just in case. She smiles and thanks you as she takes the camera back. As it passes hands, your fingers barely touch. But they do. Or at least you think they do, and maybe that's more important anyway. What is reality but a further perception of make-believe?

You're suddenly very hungry. Does Graceland have a snack bar? There's a gift-shop, you saw it on your way in. There should be a snack bar.

Rita says it's time to move on. There is so much more to see and so little time in which to see it. As you follow the group back into the hallway, two steps behind the blond, you ask yourself again. Who are these people? Who comes to Graceland the day after Thanksgiving?

Are they anything like you? Alone. Looking to escape? You don't think the fat woman is. You have a feeling the fat woman in the stretch-pants is here quite often. Maybe the guy with the tape recorder is like you, but you don't think so. He looks suspicious, with those beady eyes magnified through thick lenses and the constant chatter into that machine. Maybe the blond girl is like you. Except she's got a boyfriend. She isn't alone. She probably spends every minute of her holiday in Memphis thinking about him. What are you thinking about? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. But also everything. Maybe considering the implications of Elvis rising. A rock-n-roll resurrection. Mr. Mojo risin'. Something like that.

Maybe Rita is like you, but you highly doubt that. Anyone with this much knowledge of the King is a little too off kilter. But aren't you like that? You have your weird obsessions. You know every word to *When Harry Met Sally*. . . You know when the crescendo comes in Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*. And you don't even read music. We all have our little fixations. But Rita is just a *little* too enthusiastic about hers. Oh well. . .

What about the rest of them? The token Japanese tourists. The plaid kid who smells like pot. The short black woman with the two squirming children, one on her hip the other at her feet. What do you all have in common?

Just *him*. Just something, some kind of magical mystery that brought you all here together on the day after Thanksgiving. You're all strangers here, but you are strangers bonded by something stronger than

pass the time. This is, as shallow or superficial as it may sound, a piece of Americana. This place is a microcosm of the perfect world. Here, you put aside your differences and everyone gets along. And you decide that maybe rhyming Simon was right.

pass the time. This is, as shallow or superficial as it may sound, a piece of Americana. This place is a microcosm of the perfect world. Here, you put aside your differences and everyone gets along. And you decide that maybe rhymin' Simon was right.

religion or conviction. People don't just come here to pass the time. This is, as shallow or superficial as it may sound, a piece of Americana. This place is a microcosm of the perfect world. Here, you put aside your differences and everyone gets along. And you decide that maybe rhymin' Simon was right.

# The Black Family Structure: A Viable Structure Or A Myth?

Elaine I. Sylvester

*My objective for writing this essay on the black family was to examine and interrogate a myriad of stereotypes surrounding this family structure. Slavery and its inception need to be explored because it enables one to acquire a better understanding of the modern day black family. It is my hope that once we achieve this level of understanding, if not acceptance, that we may be able to start the healing process that is so necessary.*

THE MOYNIHAN REPORT. SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES. POVERTY. CHILDREN IN TROUBLE. The aforementioned are descriptions and reflections associated with the black family. Although these identifications are different, they all reflect one negative connotation. The connotation is that of families of African descent being "problem ridden" and "dysfunctional." Despite the fact that many families are dysfunctional, the question is: "Why are families of African descent frequently labeled as such?"

The state of black Americans and their families has been at the center of debate for decades. Biased and inaccurate reports such as the infamous Moynihan Report by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan have helped to solidify the false stereotypes surrounding the black family. Such reports and their counterparts have had a long and lasting detrimental effect. Emphasis has been placed on personal biases and racist testing procedures such as the Bitch Test instead of actual data and observation. The Bitch Test (as you can tell from its name), is very racist. It was an intelligence test designed for children of African descent. This test unlike the Stanford - Binet IQ test, asked questions which were irrelevant to the child's IQ. Questions such as, "What type of car would you call a 'hooptie'?" were asked. Instead of using the academic terminology applied to children of European descent, this testing procedure employed slang terms. The application of this testing to those of African descent prompted the labeling of the IQ test as the "Bitch Test."

Eradicating and contradicting such beliefs perpetuated by the Moynihan Report and the "Bitch Test" has been a long but steady process. Nevertheless, it is a process that those of African descent have undertaken with a great deal of vigor. Before anyone, including black Americans themselves, can truly understand where the black family is going, one has to take into account certain factors. These factors are numerous, but the one that has had the most profound effect was the institution of slavery. An in-depth study of this factor will help to answer whether the depiction of the black family as "dysfunctional" and "problem -ridden" are a reality or simply a myth.

Despite its inception some 400 odd years ago, slavery continues to impact families of African descent. Although forcibly taken to American shores with shackles and chains draped around them like garments, Africans retained some sense of family both mentally and spiritually. The familial bond which was present those 400 years ago still exists today. It is the traditional African family structure that is the baseline for the past, present and future black American family. It is therefore imperative that we examine this traditional structure.

In tribal Africa, the most important aspect of life and survival was the family. Unlike the European concept of family, the African family structure consisted of the entire community. In essence, ancestral and actual blood lines were not the primary basis for defining a family. This type of family structure continues to exist today. The institution of "fictive kin" (which consisted of individuals throughout the community) during slavery and thereafter enabled individuals to protect one another whether or not they were related. Once again, we witness how the communal bond that existed in tribal African families corresponds to contemporary black American families.

The black family has been surrounded by inaccuracies and mythology. Yes, mythology. It is not the same mythology which is embedded in Greek culture, instead it is a type of mythology whose basis is that of stereotype and fear. It is the fear of what the black family will become, not what it actually is that has promoted such negative feelings by European authorities.

African American psychologists in particular, have cited specific examples which serve as a means of labeling the black family as "dysfunctional" and "problem ridden". Some myths that continue to prevail about those of African ancestry are the following: (1) Raw and uncontrollable sex is at the root of the black family problem. (2) Blacks lack a family tradition and came to America without a sense of morality and a background of stable relationships. (3) The black family collapsed after Emancipation. (4) The black family is a product of white paternalism and government welfare. (5) The black family has always been a matriarchy characterized by strong and domineering women and weak and absent men (Bennett).

When taken into perspective, we are able to see how the previously mentioned myths are based on the institution of slavery. The belief that sex was at the root of the family problem is correct in one sense. The sense that the European practice of miscegenation underscored the problems that those of African ancestry were destined to face. The depiction of Africans as wild sexual animals was in actuality an attempt for white slave owners to overlook their own sexual depravity and promiscuity of which they engaged in with the black female servants.

The only individuals engaging in raw and uncontrollable sex were the white slave owners. Yes, raw and uncontrollable sex was at the root of the black family problem, but it was directed towards Africans, not practiced by them. If we are to question this myth, we would most likely come to the conclusion that these slave owners



engaged in bestiality. In their eyes, Africans had the attributes of animals and therefore were treated as such. Despite this belief, European slave owners continued to engage in sexual activities with individuals of whom they thought to be sub-human. In technical terms, engaging in sexual activities with animals is bestiality. In essence, the slave master's beliefs did not belie their actions. If these individuals were so animalistic in nature why did European-American women allow their children to be breast fed by female slaves? No "mother" in her right mind would allow such a thing to take place. Once again these individuals did not practice what they so earnestly believed.

A lack of family tradition and an absence of morality and a stable background is believed to be at the heart of the collapse of the black family. Although the issue of morality is often linked to the area of sex, in this sense, a lack of morality also reflects the absence of a stable family structure. The question that we often encounter is: "What type of family structure can an uprooted people have?" The answer: "Plenty".

As is often the case in American society, those who are different and who possess different beliefs are viewed as deficient. Contrary to popular belief, and as I presented earlier in this essay, an African concept of

family did exist. What European slave owners failed to realize is that those of African descent not only had a family structure but that it was based on African religious practices. "Religion is the strongest element in traditional background and exerts probably the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of the people concerned" (Mbiti 1). In addition to contradicting such European inaccuracies, the presence of religion also dispelled the myth that Africans lacked a religious foundation. What must be pointed out is the fact that just because the African family structure and practices were different, its presence should not be rendered non-existent.

The myth which has transcended both political and moral realms is the myth stating that the black family collapsed after Emancipation. In reality the black family was provided with the opportunity to collapse after Emancipation. With freedom came the following hardships for the black family: (1) A "freedom" to die of starvation and illness. (2) A majority of African-Americans remained on plantations as tenants for their former owners with little or no wages for their labors. (3) The severing of ties during the crisis of Emancipation (Eshleman 161- 162). Although Emancipation brought forth hardships it did not destroy the black family. Evidence of this is given by the simple fact that the black family still exists today.

Perhaps the most well known vehicle that has helped to strengthen such false beliefs is that of film. D.W. Griffiths' *Birth of A Nation*, while a cinematic master piece, is also a racist film. *Birth of A Nation* depicts the chaos and unrest that black Americans would engage in if they obtained the right to franchise. Throughout this film, we witness the so-called African-based tendency to self-destruct and destroy. Stereotypes such as the "brutal black buck" and the "tragic mulatto" further exemplified the behaviors that these individuals would exhibit after obtaining the right to vote. The words "brutal" and "tragic", in a subliminal manner convey the to endow such "brutal" individuals with such a privilege as voting. The compelling question is not whether or not the black family could withstand Emancipation, but more importantly whether or not the European-American family could deal with it.

Once again, we witness the fear that was inherent in emancipating those of African descent. Along with the status of being free came all of the opportunities (i.e. voting) that were supposed to come with it. It was Emancipation that compelled European-Americans to examine and consider their actions. For the first time, in a long time those of African ancestry were given the rights previously granted to only those of European descent. With freedom came the realization that those of African descent were not sub-human. This revelation enabled their former oppressors to see what they did to the black family and therefore they feared what the black family could now do to their families.

The belief that the black family is a product of white paternalism and government welfare presented in documents such as the Moynihan Report, is a myth that is misinterpreted and misconstrued. It has been the government's aim to make the black family a product of white paternalism. What is disguised as philanthropy is in actuality a means of keeping the black family in a role that is both dependent and subordinate. The welfare system, more so than black Americans themselves, has weakened the family structure. A prerequisite for being accepted into the welfare program is that a woman cannot have a husband or boyfriend if she wishes to receive assistance. What the welfare system fails to realize is that there are two parent families that are also in need of government assistance.

According to Rosemary Bray, a black woman who grew up on the welfare system, "... the welfare question has become a race question." It appears that the welfare system is simply an example of the U.S. government's lack of courage in addressing the problem that these individuals face. Money is viewed as the panacea to all of society's ills. Poverty is portrayed as an ethnic and generational trend. It is a vicious cycle. The question is, who will break that cycle? The black family has already undertaken this task via the process of sacrifice. Sacrifice is the one element that has never been absent from the black family structure. In a black family, sacrifice includes sacrificing one's dreams and aspirations and even a part of oneself. A parent possessing a minimal amount of education who attempts to send their child to college is a prime example of this type of sacrifice. The fact that their child may surpass them in terms of education does not dissuade these individuals from helping their children succeed. Sacrificing a part of oneself (such as the dream of attaining a better education for oneself) is totally altruistic. It is this one element in itself that makes the black family structure viable.

According to Norma J. Burgess, a member of the sociology and anthropology departments at Mississippi State University, "The phenomenon of the female-headed family is not new to African-American culture, nor does it call for a need for women to marry and abandon this structure" (Burgess). In the American social structure, the female-headed family is not a new product of the black family structure. In essence, the female-headed family could be viewed as a product of European interference. Burgess also lists two fundamental factors leading to the

formation of this particular family structure: (1) the female-headed family developed during slavery when slave marriages were not legally recognized. (2) The large number of pregnancies resulting from rapes by the slave master also lead to the formation of female-headed families (Burgess).

The fact that the black woman is often the backbone of the black family, does not coincide with the myth that the black family has always been characterized by "strong" and "domineering" women and "weak" and "absent" men. The truth of the matter is that the black woman often has no other choice than to be strong. If she is a single parent, an alternative does not exist if she and her family are to survive. There is nothing abnormal about a female headed household. In Africa, the family lineage is traced through the mother's or the female's line. Therefore, when has been being strong been viewed as a flaw? The answer: When it is in relation to the black woman.

Regarding the black woman herself, she is often depicted as promiscuous. It is this so called promiscuity that accounts for the myth of the black woman as always with child and unwed. This misconception is supposedly the foundation as to why black women do not have husbands and are therefore forced to raise their children alone. Once again, assumption and a love of "mythology" set the black family into a position that is viewed as "dysfunctional."

The black man's presence in the family structure as "weak" and "absent" is a stereotype in every sense of the word. While the black man may be perceived as weak and his presence non-existent, it is not universal. Not all black men are weak and not all black men are absent from their role as father. No one denies that some men appear weak and are absent from the family structure, but they do not appear this way by choice. The black man's perception of weakness is due to circumstances such as the raping of their women and a raping of his own pride. How is it possible for a black man to act or feel like a man when he is unable to protect his own family? It is difficult for any individual, much less a man of African descent, to be strong if the dominant culture has drilled this belief of being weak into him and does not allow him the opportunity to dispel such a notion.

What one may view as absence may actually be something totally different. The black man's absence in the black family structure is not necessarily a sign of weakness. Bray viewed her father's absence in an entirely different light. In her eyes, her father's departure from the apartment via the backdoor upon the arrival of social workers was a swallowing of pride on the part of her father. Like so many other men, he had to deal with the fact that the welfare system rendered him non-existent. In order for his family to receive any government assistance, he could not be a member of his household nor feel like a "strong" man in any sense of the word.

Perhaps one reason that the black family has been labeled in such an unfavorable manner is due in part to the African practice of polygamy. From a Catholic or Protestant perspective, polygamy was barbaric and a sign of promiscuity. This belief is one that has prevailed for years and continues to be associated to those of African descent. While polygamy was inherent in the African family structure, its presence did serve a purpose. Contrary to the assumption that Africans performed polygamy due in part to a lack of morals, Africans viewed this practice as a means of achieving social and economic stability. Due to such factors as war and the inevitable loss of males, polygamy enabled the plurality of wives to maintain a means of population. Another possible reason that the black family structure has been labeled unfavorably is based on the connection between slavery and familial ties.

The actual concept of slavery itself is a direct contributor to the problem that black families face today. According to W.E.B. Dubois, slavery not only affected the size of the Negro family but also their familial ties. Dubois believes that slavery created a great disproportion among the sexes. He states: "... such social derangement due the effects of violence, war and severe economic competition was a major cause for wide spread sexual irregularity" (4). It was the adverse effects of violence, war and the severity of economic conditions that have rendered communal and kinship ties non-existent in the families of slaves in America.

Upon their deportation to the "New World" Africans were unable to exercise the marital practices that they had once performed. The enslavement of African people lead to: (1) No legal marriage. (2) No legal family. (3) No legal control over children. These three restrictions in themselves resulted in the eradication of the concept of the African family. Instead of adopting white patriarchal structures, Africans had to re-vamp their previous familial structures. Their obvious goal being that of surviving in another land while at the same time retaining their Africanity. These individuals were able to do this by storytelling and African orature. This orature served as the link to their African motherland.

Although the legality of marriage was not based on a written contract, it was nevertheless based on some type of contract. The different meanings inherent in the words "legal" and "contract," although numerous, did exist. Perhaps the most devastating blow to these African people was the denial of legal family. Prior to their enslavement, the life and survival of these African people was based on the community. The community was the backbone of the African family structure. In an hierarchical family structure, (a family structure that pertains to both European and African families) that type of family structure can exist if its base is absent? The fact that these individuals had no "legal" control over their children further weakened the familial bond. It is obvious that the term "legal" is often employed. In contrast to the European concept of family, the African family did not rely on legalities to determine who or what constituted a "family." Inherent in the attempt to eradicate the African marital structure were the following restrictions: (1) A slave cannot contract matrimony. (2) Slaves may be sold and transferred from one to another without any statutory restriction, as to the separation of parents and children. (3) Slaves cannot marry without the consent of their masters (Dubois). In essence, the black family appeared to be devoid of a definite family structure due to the fact that they were not allowed to have one.

It is unquestioned that the practice of slavery was instated primarily for economic purposes. Therefore the concept of monetary gain did apply to those of African descent. The monetary value that a slave could bring for his white slave master, compelled slave owners to separate Africans from their families and sell them into chattel slavery.

The African concept of economy could be viewed as "primitive" and "simple" in contrast to the European ideology. The traditional concept of African economy was based primarily on the division of labor system. The men performed tasks such as hunting and cattle raising while the women prepared the meals.

Under the forces of slavery, the economics of the black family took on a very dramatic turn. No longer was the division labor theory the main focus of the economic structure. Instead Africans were viewed as the only type of laborers. Everything was one sided; the African side being the one that did all the work. Economics brought forth a change in the manner in which the slaves lived. Evidence of the deplorable conditions that these individuals endured are cited in *The Maryland Journal* (May 17, 1788). The newspaper lists the following conditions: (1) A single peck of corn a week or the like measure of rice is the ordinary quantity of provision for a hard working slave. (2) The master puts the unfortunate wretches upon short allowances, scarcely sufficient for their sustenance, so that a great deal of them go half starved much of the time.

The economic system transcended more than just food rations and meager allowances. Africans were clothed in the flimsiest of garments. The slave family was issued two suits; a coarse suit consisting of cotton and wool for the winter and a thin suit for the summer. Overall, the provisions issued to the slave family were extremely scanty.

It is undeniable that slavery had a deep and detrimental effect upon the black family. These individuals now have to deal with feelings of low self-esteem and a very low sense of self-worth. Adverse factors are still prevalent and these factors make it extremely difficult, although not impossible, for black Americans to go from experiencing a negative self-image to a more positive one. This difficulty to transcend a collective negative self-image, contributes to the problems that so many black Americans face in today's society.

Black Americans and other minority groups have set out particular goals in order to strengthen family and inter group relations. The two goals which groups such as black Americans hope to achieve are (1) Pluralism. Pluralistic societies grant their members the freedom to preserve their cultural heritage. (2) To develop independent societies. (Yinger). In Yinger's opinion, segregation appears to be an attack on pluralism. Fortunately it is this same segregation that has compelled the black family to seek autonomy and independence. In this case, segregation did not have its desired effect. Segregation eventually resulted in the black family's desire to re-explore the traditional practices of the African family structure.

Despite the negative stereotypes that plague the black family, the family structure continues to prevail. The contemporary black family has taken on the task of correcting these negative images. Black families: (1) Adopt children at a higher rate than their white counterparts. (2) For the hundred year period between the end of slavery and the aftermath of WW II, the structure of African-American family life was characterized by a remarkable degree of stability (Billingsley). Thus, black families are working to dispel the myths of instability and of being dysfunctional.

The black family structure is one whose evolution has been continuous. The black family is not a retrograde trend, it is a structure that is here to stay. This is not to say that the black family structure maintains the best type of family structure. There are problems that continue to plague this group of people. It has not been my attempt to portray the black family structure as the ultimate family structure. What has been my attempt is to portray the family structure as one that is viable and enduring. Like any other group, black Americans have undergone change and will continue to do so. What we should all attempt is to do is keep an open mind. Mythology should be kept where it belongs; in a book, not as a basis for oppression and inequality.

## Works Cited

- Bennett, Lerone. "The Ten Biggest Myths About The Black Family." *Ebony* November 1989.
- Billingsley, Andrew P.H.D. "Understanding African- American Family Diversity." *The State Of Black America 1990.*, National Urban League, 1990.
- Bray, Rosemary. "So How Did I Get Here?" *The New York Times Magazine* 8 November 1992.
- Burgess, Norma. "Examining The Female - Headed Family." *The Daily Orange* 12 October 1992.
- Dubois, W.E.B. *The Negro American Family*. M.I.T. Press: Cambridge MA, 1970.
- Eshelman, Ross. *The Family*. Allyn & Bacon: Boston, Ma. 1991.
- Graves, Carl. "Challenges For The Black Family." *Black Enterprise*. December 1988.
- Mbiti, John. *African Religions And Philosophy*. Heinemann Educational Books: London, 1988.
- Yinger, Milton. *A Minority Group In American Society*. McGraw Hill: New York, 1965.
- Please Note: Documentation errors were not correctible by press time. The Editors.*

## Queen Anne's Lace

Patricia Z. Cowden

*This paper, an assignment for Chris Madden's Writing 105 Class, asked us to write about a time or event which caused us to change our minds about something important to us. I thought that there couldn't be a better change for me to write about than the one that seemed to be culminating at that moment. We were asked to explain and contextualize our original belief, identify how our ideas had changed, and account for the process of re-thinking. Writing Queen Anne's Lace was quite a release, and the experience has left me fascinated with the power of writing to effect the writer as well as the reader.*

---

*You are Queen Anne's Lace--both delicate and hardy, with a visible heart--You don't need a garden to bloom, and you change color depending on how you are nurtured. --Eileen Sorrentino*

---

Ah, yes! If I'm to be a flower, please, no hothouse variety here, no shrinking violet that can only survive when pampered. I would want to be beautiful, healthy, and delicate everywhere; in a field, by a road, in a vase, in a wreath in a child's hair. I would definitely want to be the type of flower that children pick when they wish to bestow on some lucky person the inestimable honor of their love.

My sister Eileen, the poet lawyer, passes the time, when she's running, assigning flowers to family members according to their personalities and how they "blossom." Then she makes up little poems about them.

I knew mine would have to be a wild flower (it is not politically correct to call us weeds) but what a surprise it was to be named for the very flower for which I had gotten into so much trouble when I was a child. I had just been sitting by the side of a field studying the intricacies of their lace. . .so pretty. Where had the time gone? As I remember it, I was old enough to tell time and to know I was in trouble, and I was right. My poor mother's eyes would get so clouded when I would tell her after such an incident just what I had been doing. "I was just watching the ants parade." "I was building dams and canals in the mud puddles." "I was tracing the beautiful patterns of the "Queen Anne's Lace." These would always be followed by. . .and I lost track of the time." I was lucky enough to have a mother who knew her child well and she knew that I wasn't lying. She was unlucky enough to have a child whom she knew well but found utterly baffling.

Childhood--a rich garden full of the promise of bloomings to come. . .Get real.

With the curious mind I had and fortunately haven't lost to adulthood, my childhood should have been just that. I wonder how I would have bloomed if it had been. However, school brought me into the care of the Brides of Christ, an unfortunate group of women, who when they were young girls and got caught up in the romance of marrying Christ, were not made aware of the fact that on their tired shoulders would fall the care of all Christ's children and much of His property as well. Many of them just didn't like children but they had no choice about teaching us and maintaining discipline in our classrooms.

On the first day of school in the first grade, I asked for homework. I just couldn't wait to start learning and I wanted to be like my older sister. Sister Mary Magdalene probably was trying to teach me what was going to be expected of me in school, not to overstep my boundaries. She gave me so much to do that I never asked again no matter how much I wanted to know about a topic my class was studying.

In second grade I had learned to memorize our reading assignments. In Sister Charlotte's class, if you lost your place during reading, you had to hold a spoonful of hot peppers in your mouth. I memorized the assignments so that I could and did recite the piece if I lost my place. The other children told her what I was doing, but she didn't believe it was possible. I had developed a damned good memory, but I lost my interest in books. My reading began to be slower than that of the other children.

In fourth grade Sister Michelle asked for a volunteer to print his or her name on the board on the first day of school. I proudly went up and printed with great care "Patty Ziobro," the name I had always used. Sister Michelle stood me in front of the class as ". . .the child who is so stupid she doesn't even know her own name." "Patty" is not a saint's name; I was supposed to have used "Patricia." I didn't volunteer another thing in a class for thirty-eight years.

By eighth grade my reading really was beginning to be a problem. It was clear that I was bright, but I worked so slowly that being bright wasn't enough. We were preparing to take entrance tests for Catholic high schools and I was not doing as well as was necessary in order to get into my school of choice. The Bride of the Year, Sister Agnes Gabriel, regularly locked me in a closet for passing notes. I continued to pass notes so that she would lock me in the closet and I could get out of the class that I had learned to hate. After a few months she caught on to

what I was doing and thought of a way to take care of two of her problems at once. She had been asked to try out and evaluate the Science Reading Lab program for students having difficulty in reading. However, she had only one Science Reading Lab to work with and twenty seven children in the class. Her other problem was what to do with me. A perfect match! She stopped locking the door and let me go into the closet will ingly to work on the lab. It was a wonderful program that got me back to appreciating reading and really did improve my reading skills considerably. She had found a clever solution, but if she had ever been a good teacher, too many children and too many years had made her bitter and burnt out.

I did get into a Catholic high school and eventu ally transferred into the one that I originally wanted to attend, but I was placed in the C sectionthe lowest academically. This affected how we were taught, the extracurricular activities we were admit ted to, even our social standing.

Being a third-rate member of my high school destroyed any confidence I had remaining. I was constantly frightened of the humiliating and brutal discipline. I had learned to expect to be disapproved of and I withered in that type of environmentstill do. As a defense I had developed a most remarkable ability to go unnoticed. . .to sort of disappear into the walls. It's a handy skill that I can still call upon to get through loosely organized security blocks, though I rarely use it because it isn't as easy to drop it as it is to adopt.

---

*The quieter, less dramatic plants need to be supported and have attention drawn to them by other. . .elements. Viki Ferreniea, Wildflowers in Your Garden*

---

It was essential to my survival to find a means of building a positive self-image, and I was blessed to find it outside of the school setting, and in a non -academic environment I was very successful. Mrs. Bartels was the source of inspiration for an entire class of highschool girlseven the "in" crowdwho re mained active in Girl Scouting throughout their high -school careers. She simply introduced the idea of service. She believed, and said right out loud, that at this age kids want to start giving back. She mentored our troop while we worked in an orphanage, a cerebral palsy school, ran a county wide lending library of camping equipment, and led troops of little girl scouts. She made sure we did it all ourselves and regularly let us know how important we were, how much we were needed, how responsible our service jobs were. I blosomed as I met every expectation she had of me and have never lost the feeling that I was meant for great things and was capable of anything.

Ah, but there was still school. As a senior in high school I gave up my dream of a college degree. . .for the first time. Sister Bernadette, the Bride who served as guidance counselor, met with me once during my entire high school career. She told me what my IQ was a big "no, no" in psychology circlesand said there was no reason I should be having so much trouble keeping my grades up. "You just aren't trying. You have to work for good grades. You'll never make it in college." I had been studying five hours every night, give or take an hour. I thought she was probably right about college, so I needed to learn a marketable skill. And I wanted one that would keep me mobile so I could go everywhere. I went to business school.

At my school, Katharine Gibbs, in 1964 academic achievement was not considered important for women. I was taking a liberal arts course, but that was not the emphasis. In business school one spent a lot of time and energy learning to work fast. I did all right in my college level courses. I did quite well in accuracy. But I failed in speed, and speed counted for a lot. How ever, Gibbs deserves its reputation as an excellent school, and for the first time I saw the difference between blind exercise of power and purposeful regu lations.

The experience went a long way toward getting me past indiscriminate resentment of authority. I planned to get a degree after I started working since I could see quite early on that a career that relied heavily on fast typing was not the career for me.

---

*A weed is a plant out of place.*

*Carlton B. Lees & Lady Bird Johnson, Wild flowers Across America*

---

I stumbled into a job working with emotionally disturbed children that I thought I'd try for a year before I got a "real" job. Most of the service work I had done in high school had been with children and I found their ready affection and unrestrained minds addic tive. I stayed at that job for sixteen years. I was good at it and felt it was important. Promotions came until I couldn't be promoted any more and still work with the children. If I was going to stay in the field I needed a degree. . .a Masters. During that time there were sev eral attempts to start working on my college degree. None of them ever got me past one night in the dreaded classroom, and I started evaluating why I had such a hard time with school.

At work I was learning about mental disorders, neurological problems and learning disabilities. I read articles, attended workshops, watched TV shows, did everythingexcept take coursesto find out about the academic difficulties of the children I was working with and about my own. As people with learning disabilities described their

school experiences, it sounded like they were talking about my life: the teachers' accusing laziness, not believing how hard they were working; the use of memory to get by; letter reversals; lines of type moving on the page. I had it! I was learning disabled.

After these many years of working in a school for emotionally disturbed children, I went to work in a wonderful day care center. The children were beautiful, bright, well-cared-for, delightful; and I miss them still. Again promotions came until I was both the assistant director and a teacher.

However, after ten mostly happy years there, the school's financial problems made administrative decisions necessary that I could not support. I gave up being assistant director and thought I could go back to being only a teacher. It just doesn't work that way, and it became necessary for me to look for another place to work. In day care, when a teacher changes centers, she is hired as a completely new employee. After twenty-six years experience, I would have been hired at under \$5 an hour as an inexperienced teacher. This was impossible for me both financially and personally.

There had been several additional attempts to attend college during this time. . . I stopped counting at ten. . . but finally I had accepted the idea that a learning disability would prevent me from ever receiving a degree. It was actually a comfortable idea, and at least it explained the ever present question of why school had been such a disaster.

I had been able to avoid the worst of the consequences of my lack of an education. True, I had never had a good paying job nor one that carried any status with it, but I had been able to get by. Now, however, things had reached a climax. I couldn't stay in day care and there was nothing else I could do. Mingled with

incredible desperation was the sense of failing myself, I remembered Mrs. Bartels. I was supposed to have been destined for great things. I should have been able to do anything, yet here I was with absolutely no options. My thinking was paralyzed except for repeating the question that had been asked about me so often in school, "What is wrong with me?"

*One man's weed is another man's orchid.*

*Carlton B. Lees & Lady Bird Johnson, Wild flower Across America*

I went to the Regional Learning Service in a sorry state and thus began a year of change in which I would turn myself absolutely inside-out. I cried my way through my first interview fully expecting to be told that I needed to compose myself if I was going to be able to find a job. Instead I was met by the encouragement and studied positive attitude of Sandra Clarke. I knew the drill. "Keep telling them that they can do it. Don't accept negative statements." However, I also knew a phony attitude by then, and that's not what I was seeing when I looked at Sandra. She gave me all the aptitude and interest tests and came up with the fact that the jobs I would be most successful and happy at, in fact, the only jobs I showed any interest in at all, required a degree. . . maybe two. "But I can't get a degree. I have never succeeded in school. I think I have a learning disability." Sandra didn't dispute my conclusions, but she did convince me to get tested.

The doctor was quite clear no learning disability but a classic case of testing anxiety, sort of a school phobia, enough even to be responsible for the lines of moving type. Odd that my reaction should not have been one of pure elation. But now I was back to facing the impossible challenge of school. I didn't think I could go back to that (and I was right), but I didn't have any idea of what to do. The doctor recommended that I see a therapist specifically to address the issue of my panic in school. I didn't like that idea at all, but while I had given up my dream of getting a degree, I never did lose my desire to have one. And, after all, I really had no choice.

Off I went in the middle of January to see Dr. Sprafkin, oozing wariness from every pore. What an office! They still had their Christmas decorations up. These were people after my own heart. There was a hole in the receptionist's counter at floor level. It wasn't particularly noticeable until one of the office cats came strolling out for its tithe of head scratches. I was in the office I always had wanted to work in. It made sense. How could I feel wary in a place like this?

Dr. Sprafkin was slightly built and a little too neat. In a reserved way, he exuded competence; I liked him. But he related to me in a rather remote way and was a little shy and uptight. He hardly seemed the type to be able to really get into my soul. Why should it have come as such a surprise that he wasn't all that interested in my soul? He was there simply to teach me the tools I needed to address a particular problem and that was just what he began to do. I had signed up for an Anthropology course and right away we started learning what to do when panic begins to rear its ugly head. . . what to do when I see a blue book. He taught me to relax and to see myself succeeding. It was one of the hardest years of my life. I shook, I cried, I worried, I did relaxation exercises incessantly, I got an A. But that A wasn't what made me decide I could back to school. There were two other things that happened that sealed my decision. One was simply the way I reacted when my Anthropology class was over. I expected the usual end-of-the-school-year reaction of relief coupled with a strong desire to throw my books into the nearest river. I was astonished to find myself at a bit of a loss and to feel that I couldn't wait to do it again. I had slain the dragon. That feeling answered many of my doubts about spending so much time taking classes and would not have been there without Dr. Sprafkin and Sandra Clarke. The other incident was not so positive.

Shortly after I finished my anthropology class, I went to see a college admissions counselor to see just how many credits I still needed to receive my degree. When he heard of the courses I had taken at Katharine Gibbs, he told me that I should have sixty credits. I was delighted. I really could do this. It wasn't going to take all that long to finish just my junior and senior year. Two weeks later I was told that none of my college level courses could be counted. I had no credits at all. My first reaction was, "That's it. I really can't do this." My next reaction was, "I've gone too far and worked too hard. I can't *not* do this." The dye was cast.

I hired someone to teach me WordPerfect and fell in love with computers. I quit my job with no where else to go, but with a plan to gain experience in temporary jobs, then to apply for work at S.U. so I could go to college.

---

*Wildflowers represent nature's most successful marriage of beauty and resilience, strength and delicacy. Viki Ferreniea, Wildflowers in Your Garden*

---

So here I am a second semester freshman. I know that I can succeed in school. I'm too old for a Freshman and that tickles me, even though much of the rest of my life will be spent in school. No longer do I just want the degree. I want to learn about almost everything. Sometimes it feels like I'm building dams and canals in puddles or tracing the intricacies of Queen Anne's Lace. My story is hardly told. I'm a long way from my degree, but if the question is, "When will that old Freshman ever realize her dream?" The answer is, "I already am."

# One Young Dog

Sam Szuck

*Autobiography and redundancy are natural associates. Keeping them apart in the act of recalling a life, any life, is no easy task. Given the assignment of imagining my autobiography and writing one of the chapters, I wanted to avoid repeating myself. "Tell me a story." It does not matter that I have lived it before. Telling it again becomes a new act, another page of the story. "Tell me a story," Jane Oberg asked. I thank her for the question.*

---

*If we do not know our own history, we are doomed to live it as though it were our own private fate.--  
Hannah Arendt*

---

Told that the soul teaches incessantly the young man asked Rebbe Pinhas why it was then that we do not learn? "The soul teaches incessantly" the Rebbe continued, "but it never repeats."

---

## Forward

Some people are asked to write their life's story, while others force their story on us with all the vigor and vanity of a songbird. That some of these birds sing beautifully and are as fascinating as they think they are may just be one of those happy fortunes I might just as well question less and enjoy more. The reasons for writing an autobiography remain suspect, however. Murray proposes that writing an autobiography can be therapeutic. There are certain themes that haunt or house our lives with which we must deal, and do deal within in spite of ourselves. Bruner sees in auto biography clues to the mental landscapes in which we think through our existence. It provides us with a means for understanding how others understand themselves. I do not doubt that Murray and Bruner are right. Right and dull as last week's shine on the apple. Self-disclosure can be therapeutic, or destructive. Ibsen's *Wild Duck* comes to mind as an example of the latter. If you believe in self deception and even consider the possibility of an unconscious, Bruner's claims fall flat. It seems to me these two constructs fail. Heilbrun's construct is better made. The stories that women tell become the stories that women will live. I had many examples of how to be a human being, human as a man. It did not occur to me how many men's lives I had exposure to, to review and follow through to extinction in order to negotiate my way

through mine. As a mother-raised male I was also restricted by the small number of female lives I had before me to view and choose to emulate or ignore (though their specific gravity was great!). Heilbrun is correct. This is reason enough to tell our daughters every story we can think of, every story we have lived. There is an ethical justification, if no aesthetic justification.

Having been asked to write an autobiographical piece I turned to a project that I have considered in the past. I have wanted to write a series of autobiographical short stories about Liverpool and the people that I grew up with and around. What follows is a first run at this. Each chapter is a short story. I have titled all of the stories and have provided glimpses into what they would be written around. Unfortunately, I never know what a story is really going to be about until it is over. The story I offer here is actually in transition. It is not over even though the "event" does take place.

## A Strawberry Jam

The Larson farm grew strawberries and paid migrant workers a few cents per quart to pick them. One summer of wide sunshine and open fields, my brother and I got a job along side of them for the same few cents per quart. I do not recall the precise event, but a battle broke out between my brother and a group of the children migrant workers. They threw strawberries at each other. I knew that my brother had started it, and that he was in the wrong, but I took his side and joined in. We were fired. The other children were not. Mr. Larson told us, "It's their life, dammit. You kids are just playin' around."

Framing the choosing of sides and the pleasure of battle, the stark reality of migrant work and poverty rolled in like dark clouds.

## Gonna Do, Gonna Do



I was nine years old when the Treadwell place went up in flames. The fire department had started it. They took all summer to burn it down. "Punishment," my mother murmured, looking out from our kitchen window and across the road.

"I hope they don't hurt the trees," she whispered.

I looked out the window, past her arm washing plates, around the edge of her sleeve, and saw the great pine soldiers glowing in the light of battle. Strangely silent beyond the muffled clatter of the dishes in the sink, the firemen went about their work like spirits weighted down by heavy coats and unbuckled boots. There was no hurry in their movement, no sense of urgency equal to what I saw. I caught my mother's sleeve.

"There, there." She looked down at me peeking from around her arm. "It's a practice fire. The firemen know what they're doing." We watched as orange light splashed through the roof, dissolving large chunks of it at a time. Black bags appeared under neath the window sills.

"Just don't hurt the trees," my mother repeated.

The road my parents had built our house on had been given to Joseph Hopkins, an officer in the Union army during the Civil War. The government had run out of cash and were paying their officers severance in land grants. The Treadwell's had been farming the land across from ours for at least three generations. Unfortunately the third act of their family saga turned to tragedy. Stories of madness and death, children who moved across the country, never to return, and a daughter who hung herself from a hook in the attic. Before the practice fires, Billy Williams and I explored the vacant house and found the bloody hook. Only it wasn't bloody. It was clean and white and evil looking. We found it in the attic, as legend had it, four -fingered and sharp. A door fell open from underneath it. Billy stretched out across the absent floor and pulled on the hook.

"Not. . .too. . .shabby. . ." he grunted as he pulled.

"How old was she?"

"Sweet sixteen and never been kissed!" He held on to the hook and swung out and down. "I wouldn'ta kissed her."

"I would've." I declared, more to be contrary than because of a positive thought. Billy let go of the evil claw and fell to the floor below.

"Rusty'd kiss a corpse! Rusty'd kiss a corpse!" He rolled from side to side as he chanted.

"Not then! Before she died!"

Billy Billy (he had two first names) jumped up and skipped out of view.

"Gonna do, gonna do. . ." I heard him begin some

other song as I reached out toward the hook and felt its cold memory. I shook my hand harder than I had ever shook it before as I ran back down the stairs.

After that first fire my mother would not let me go back into the Treadwell's house. I know that Billy did. He lived at the end of the road, in what was once a one room school house. It had been fire engine red, we were told. It had long since been singed gray. Time and neglect would have burned that house down, if the children of the neighborhood did not beat them to it. Billy's father worked for the farmer Larson. From what I gathered, he worked six and one-half days a week. And for this great labor he was given the house to keep his family in and a small piece of land on which to raise that family and whatever else he wanted. I could never figure out what the attraction was with cabbage. When Billy and his brother John and sister Helena snuck into our above-ground pool while we were away, and split the sides of the pool like a burst can of peas, washing my mother's garden away, Mr. Williams brought us cabbage. When my mother dropped off clothing for Helena with the coal black eyes, Mr. Williams would drop off some cabbage. My mother would accept it with a smile and a nod of her head, "Why, thank you Mr. Williams. How sweet of you! But you really shouldn't." A chorus of amens and hallelujahs would have followed that, if thoughts had their way.

Mrs. Williams was a quiet woman. She sat at the foot of the stairs in the back of the house during the day looking at their television. No picture. Only sound. She smoked filterless Camels, letting them drop from her fingers like dead caterpillars. She rarely spoke to her children, instead she would scream orders or complaints in quick fits, and then return her attention to the vacant white light of the TV screen. I thought that the machine had stolen her mind. One evening I went over for supper. The table was uneven. In order to balance things out, she propped the salt and pepper shakers with matchbooks, and folded napkins half-way under our plates. I pretended not to notice, and complemented her on the meal. Billy knew I was lying, but he was also grateful. He knew she did not really understand a lot of things. Life was a large mystery she would never be able to solve, and so it was best to keep up with the soaps, and marvel at their way of handling it all. Through the years he passed from unimpeded affection, to embarrassment and rage at her thick ignorance. When he last saw her, there was forgiveness in his tears.

The pounding at the door woke me up. As I made my way through the breezeway, my brother already ahead of me, Mr. Williams was coming through the door.

"Damn kid." He swung off his hat, shook the damp from its brim and placed it under the arm he extended to my father.

"Thanks t'ya. I don't know where he's off to. Crying, crazy-like. I been all ta places. Thought your son'd have an idea." He looked at me. My father looked at me. My mother, who was pulling her robe around her waist as she

pushed her foot into a slipper, looked at me. Even my brother was looking at me as if I had to have the answer. As if who else could have the answer. I didn't really know the question.

"He's run away." Mr. Williams continued. There was panic and hurt in his voice, all jammed into the space of those three words. I told him that I had not seen Billy that day and that I did not know anything about his running away.

"Can I use your telephone?"

The Williams family did not have a phone.

"Of course. It's in the kitchen. I'll get my keys. We can drive around and see if we can find him."

It was cold. We checked the Treadwell place first. I told them about Billy continuing to go into the farm house even after the fire department had begun to use it for practice fires.

"Billy!" My father called out. We stood at the porch and waited for him and Mr. Williams to come out.

"Nine houses." My mother shook her head. "The man had to walk by nine houses in order to use a telephone. And so upset and worried." She patted my hair softly. "We'll find him. Did Mr. Williams say how his wife is? I'll have your father drop me off when they go look for him in the car."

Billy was not in the house. After dropping my mother off to check on Mrs. Williams and the other children, my father and Mr. Williams drove up and down the roads. I was in the back seat. My eyes were red and watery, but I could look just as hard as anyone could. We drove for a very long time. Mr. Williams spoke in broken sentences.

"I do m'best. I work. She's s'posed to see to him and the girl. Johnny's okay. Slower'n shit. Like his mom. She's not tellin' the truth. He don't hate me. Billy's my first born. He don't hate me."

"Gonna do, gonna do. . ." I heard Billy's voice in my brain. "Gonna grow up to be a god." His voice came out of the night through the seal of the car windows closed tight against the cold.

"Gonna do, gonna do. Gonna grow up to be a god, and never have to die, or worse to have a death . . ." Billy's poem went on and on in my head as I peered through the heavy darkness. Mr. Williams was mur

muring more to himself now. His head circled as his eyes scanned the dark fields on the side of the road.

"She's s'posed to see to him. He'd never say that about me. I'm his father. She's a liar. Slow, stupid liar."

My father looked at me. He had never met Mrs. Williams.

"There!" I hollered.

Billy was walking in the center of the road. He held his arms out ahead of him. In each hand he was carrying a candle. Both were lithalo stains against the black sky. Mr. Williams padded from the car and was at Billy's side by the time my father and I ap proached.

"Gonna do what, son? Shit, gonna do what?" Mr. Williams knocked the candles from Billy's hands in two sweeping motions. Billy didn't seem to notice at first. As if coming out of a trance, he stopped walking and turned to his father.

"Gonna grow up to be a god, daddy. A god."

Mr. Williams swept him up in his arms and carried him back to the car.

## Young Dogs

We were like puppies really. A haunted house, broken glass, drunken workers from the General Electric plant. . . a mystery solved. We were too young and too dumb to know just how dangerous things were. We took on the mystery and solved it. Drunks and fire, glass and rage. Young dogs, pissing and laughing and lunging our way through an adventure.

## Nate Perry

Some of our heroes are discovered after much time. Nate Perry, principal of Buckley Road Elementary School, is one such hero. I was often in trouble and in his office, crying, leaving a pile of shredded tissue at my feet. It was my way of assuring him that I was not truly repentant. He would often come into a class and walk Billy Billy to his office.

Billy Billy was always in trouble too. His trouble seemed worse though, and it was. We would giggle at his fate, imagining what terrible punishment Mr. Perry would devise. Years later I found out that Mr. Perry would buy him shoes every six months, take him out for lunch and a haircut, buy him a durable winter coat, and more-or-less treat him like a grand son that he loved.

Billy Billy was predictably in trouble much of the time. Mr. Perry also knew how proud his spirit was. Nobody but his secretary and a few other adults knew. They renamed Buckley Road Elementary many years later. In letters clear enough, if not large enough, it is now called Nate Perry Elementary School. It is undoubtedly more than he would have wanted.

## Trees, Tees and Ice Cream

Trees have endured with me as companions over a lifetime. From the willow tree my parents planted by the side of the house, to the elm under which I stole my first kiss, through a theory of personality I proposed consisting of

"tree-ness" equaling health, rather than "pine-ness" or "oak-ness" as the established theories held. A trip through the wood. A stroll with me and some trees, and the memories I have hung upon those trees.

### **The Night is Like a Thief**

Father Anthony Keefe was the first truly Christian man I ever met. Goodness and humor attended him wherever he went. He brought room enough for angels, and courage enough for at least one other soul. On a Thanksgiving night a man with a knife broke into the rectory to steal the parish car. Father Keefe was attacked and cut up very badly. The man was apprehended the same night and taken to jail. After Father Keefe was stitched and bandaged up, he visited the man in his cell, arranged for legal counsel, and added this man's burdens to those he would carry for as long as it took, or for as long as it mattered. God works in moments. Miracles are for the long-haul.

### **Mary Baker Eddy Abroad**

Mark Twain disliked Mary Baker Eddy and her hybrid religion, Christian Science, emphatically! He wrote at length about its fakery and intellectual plagiarisms. I went to Nice, France with a Christian Scientist named Tom, a woman from Washington State named Margaret, and a model from California named Elda. We dumped Margaret, broke into the train station, camped under an aqueduct, and wrestled with life on the shores of the Mediterranean. Life won. Not quite "inno cents abroad," but a story worth telling. **Autumn**

Autumn is my time of year summer going south winter coming near. Associations. I return to this theme. I try to show the ego and the arrogance of high school football. How I got to start as a senior after another young man broke his neck. How some cheerleaders were not sluts, or vain, or both. How teachers are students and students teach great lessons. How being shamed by a young man with cerebral palsy stopped the unmerciful teasing of another young man who just did not fit in.

### **Pater Ann**

Love. This story is tough to tell, and I don't know that I can or will ever be able to tell it. As Annie Dillard correctly pointed out, truth cannot be written to be told. . . some truths are just too important. I was no longer a child after this relationship. If you lose the key to a lock, what are you to do? You break the lock. This lets you in. She left me broken, but perhaps, finally, more accessible. Love is a secret that we tell in the silence as we go.

{Pater is 'father' in Latin, as for a priest. In a different set of circumstances, she would have been a priest. As it is, she ministers truthfully and compassionately enough.}

### **Afterward**

Story telling is an essential feature of being human. Autobiography is perhaps the literary equivalent to what existentialists meant by an authentic act. It seems to me, however, that we can tell our own story, truly, through the stories that we tell. In so doing we allow the reader not only to hear, but to see their way through it. I doubt that I came anywhere near accomplishing this in this exercise, but I hope that I may have pointed in the direction I was headed.

# Ethics in the Field of Public Relations

*by Amy Appleby*

*This essay was the product of Writing Studio 209, a course focusing on rhetoric. However, my interest in the topic was piqued during the prior semester. My p.r. professor delivered a lecture on ethics in the field of public relations; it was this oxymoron that enticed me into researching and proposing a solution to negative connotation that often plagues public relations practitioners.*

## Roots of Public Relations

Contemporary public relations is a twentieth-century phenomenon that evolved from the press gentry of the 1800s. These old-time press agents played upon the credulity of the public in its desire to be entertained, whether or not they were deceived. Advertisements and press releases were often exaggerated to the point of being complete falsifications. In promoting an attraction, press agents dropped multitudes of tickets on the newspaper editors desk along with the releases. Voluminous publicity for the attraction usually resulted, and reporters, editors, and their families flocked to the free entertainment with scant regard for any ethical constraints (Wilcox, Ault, & Agee 37). One man, Phineas T. Barnum, exemplified such a press agent to the extreme. Barnum is considered the master of the pseudoevent, the planned event that occurs primarily for the purpose of being reported similar to the special events held by public relations practitioners of today. However, modern-day practitioners like to draw the line of comparison between Barnum and themselves at this point. This hardheaded businessman used deception and hoax in his operations and in his publicity and advertising. Nevertheless, a public thirsting for entertainment permitted his exaggerations and people were amazed by the wonders he produced (Wilcox, Ault, & Agee 38). For example, Joice Heath was a slave who claimed to be 161 years old and said she had been George Washington's nurse. Barnum produced a stained birth certificate as evidence for the public, but after she died, her autopsy disclosed that she was far younger. On the same note, Jumbo, the world's largest elephant, was brought by Barnum from England with enormous publicity. Posters and pamphlets featuring inflated prose exaggerated the animal's size (Wilcox, Ault, & Agee 38).

Roots such as these have created the skepticism with which the public views the field of public relations. Furthermore, it is the duty of practitioners to create positive images for businesses and organizations. Therefore, other, more recent issues have augmented Americans' mistrust in the business world in general, including the Watergate Affair and the business-and-government-related scandals of the 1980s, such as the near collapse of the savings and loan industry. The American public is demanding higher ethical practices from business firms and organizations than it did in the past (Wilcox, Ault, & Agee 116).

## How Public Relations Practitioners are Perceived

Despite pressure from the public, very little empirical evidence on the ethics of public relations practitioners exists. As recently as the spring of 1988, a Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) task force could only uncover 16 journal articles and two books as initial readings that dealt with ethics issues in length (Pratt, "Empirical" 230).

However, one study conducted in 1989, has revealed the pathetic state of ethics in, and has called into question the credibility, professional integrity and public image of, public relations (229). In the broad field of mass communications, of which public relations practitioners are considered a part, the occupation is viewed with cynicism. For example, an investigation of journalists' attitudes toward public relations, conducted in 1975, disclosed generally negative attitudes. In this sample survey, respondents had to rank the perceived respect of 16 occupations and professions; journalists ranked themselves first and public relations practitioners last, while public relations practitioners ranked themselves fourth and journalists third.

It has also been reported that college students develop a negative disposition toward public relations early on in their college careers. This disposition could be caused by the content of textbooks. In a content analysis of 12 introductory textbooks in mass communications, an insidious bias against public relations and a fierce anti-public relations stance was found (229).

Even public relations practitioners have doubts about the degree of morality in the field. In a recent survey of practitioners, none of the respondents assigned very high marks to the honesty and ethical standards of their colleagues. Fifty-five percent of them viewed the chief executive as the most credible source of information about an organization, and only five percent selected a public relations representative (Pratt, "Empirical," 230). Ironically, practitioners themselves hold little credence in the ability of their peers to carry out an essential component of their profession: the management of an organizations relationships with its various publics. Often times, the management of these relationships is jeopardized by poor decision-making on the part of practitioners.

## **Judgment Calls**

Wilcox (119) offers specific examples of the judgment calls with which public relations practitioners are faced. For instance, if the company president asks a public relations representative to write a news release claiming that a new product is four times better than the competition, he/she should be wary. Making extravagant claims about a product, which cannot be substantiated, should be avoided. Another example could be an American company that wants to increase its visibility and market share in Eastern Europe. The director of public relations invites a group of German business editors to visit the firms headquarters with all expenses paid. This is considered permissible by the whole body of practitioners, as long as the visit has legitimate news value, and as long as it furthers the press understanding of the companys operations.

A primary judgment call happens during the job search of a public relations practitioner. To illustrate, if a tobacco company offers someone the highest salary from among his/her potential employers, he/she should not oppose smoking. This could place the person in a position where personal interest is in conflict with an employer or client, and fulfilling obligations to the employer would be difficult.

Dilemmas such as these must be addressed by practitioners everyday. One might glance at these examples and wonder were the difficulty in making these decisions lies. The fact is that not everybody holds the same set of personal and/or professional standards. One person might not see anything wrong with exaggerating a news release for a new product, while another might consider such an act to be dishonest.

Studies have been done which categorize public relations practitioners as being either more ethical or less ethical; the factors that have been researched and that provided conclusive evidence include age, years of experience, gender, and individual moral values. The older and the more years of experience, the more ethical the practitioner. Similarly, the higher ones individual moral values are, the more ethical ones professional standard will be (Shamir, Reed, & Connell 956-953). Female practitioners beliefs were significantly more ethical than those of their male counterparts. It was also reported that women practiced unethical behavior less often than men (Pratt, "Perceptions," 153).

In addition to incongruous ethical standards, several other factors serve as possible reasons for the lack of values. A number of practitioners said that because of the competitive environment in which practitioners tend to work, ethics may have low priority (Pratt, Empirical 232). Also, some practitioners blame the availability, or lack thereof, of good, effective role models, particularly among top business executives, for both practitioners and society in general. In a nationwide study of U.S. business ethics conducted by Brenner and Molander, respondents reported that the behavior of ones superiors was a primary influence on the making of unethical decisions (Pratt, "Empirical," 233).

## **Proposed Solutions to the Ethical Dilemma**

The only way for public relations practitioners to rid themselves of this unethical behavior is to come up with plausible solutions. Public relations practitioners surveyed proposed several suggestions, varying in degrees of severity. First, some respondents said that because ethics in public relations is a reflection of a general decline in values, overall ethics in society should be improved by instilling moral values in the home (Pratt, "Empirical," 232). This, however, would be a difficult task in todays society, due to the deterioration of stable homes. It would be a long-term undertaking, and the results would not be seen for years. Furthermore, this solution could not be taken on solely by public relations practitioners; rather, all of society would have to be willing to pursue greater ethics in each and every household. Another proposed solution deals with education. Practitioners believe that stronger exploration of ethics issues in high school and college curricula, more ethics awareness among upper management, and better clarification on what is or is

not acceptable behavior would solve the problem (231). After completing a media ethics course, mass communications students displayed an increase in the importance they placed on moral and social issues, an increase their awareness of such issues, and shifts in their value system to approximate more closely the value system affording the greatest level of ethical self-esteem (232). Thus, similar results could be achieved if current practitioners were involved in a continuing education program that offered courses in ethics. However, I believe that the positive results of such courses would be like temporary exposure to sun: At first you have a beautiful, bronze tan, but after awhile that tan fades; initially, the practitioners would place more emphasis on moral issues, but, like the tan, that emphasis will fade.

Another recommendation is to place more emphasis on personal professionalism. Practitioners suggested that, if employers hire honest people, it may help change the image of practitioners from that of incompetent, shoddy opportunists. They also suggested practitioners need to look at their responsibilities as much more than just jobs but as a way of life, and that practitioners should be well-trained in public relations. Striving toward full professionalization could improve professional ethics (Pratt, Empirical 232). In addition, specifying exactly what constitutes public relations would clear up any misperceptions on the part of practitioners.

Other ideas include rewarding and publicizing good conduct, developing a universally-honored code of ethics, and governmentally regulating the licensing of public relations practitioners. Of all the solutions suggested, from increasing household values to hiring honest people, the two proposals that have been taken the most seriously by practitioners are the development of a code and the licensing of practitioners. The following reasoning has led to their earnest contemplation:

How could public relations survive as a profession, if as many of its practitioners as are believed to be guilty of unethical behavior were actually guilty? Wouldn't many of the college students choosing to major in this field change their minds? After all, who would want to number him/herself among such cheats? It is quite possible that the field of public relations is not as corrupt as people make it seem. The majority of ethical practitioners could be taking the bad rap for the minority of those who are unethical.

However, popular beliefs will prevail. The only way for practitioners to free themselves of this stereotype is to take action against the few that ruin it for the many. In an attempt to do that, some public relations practitioners support licensing and consider it to be the only solution.

### **Licensing as a Solution**

Proposals to take the control of ethical decision-making out of the hands of practitioners and to put it into the hands of the state had been discussed even before the PRSA was founded. Edward L. Bernays, a proponent of licensing who played an indispensable role in formulating the modern concept of public relations, believes that licensing would protect the profession and the public from charlatans who do not have the knowledge, talent, or ethics required (Wilcox, Ault & Agee 129). The problem is stated by a PRSA task force on demonstrating professionalism:

Pick up any metropolitan newspaper and scan the employment ads. Under the public relations classification, you are likely to find opportunities for door-to-door salespersons, receptionists, used-car salespeople, singles bar hostesses and others of less savory reputation. The front pages of the newspapers are full of stories about former government employees peddling influence and calling it public relations. (Wilcox 129)

If public relations practitioners had to obtain a license in order to practice, those who did not meet a certain set of qualifications would have to refer to themselves as something other than public relations counselors. The qualifications could resemble those of a doctor or lawyer, such that a practitioner would have to pass a certain level of education, rigid examinations, and tests of personal integrity. Other designations adopted by those who failed to meet the standards could be publicist or press agent.

Several arguments have been offered, both for and against, mandatory licensing and regulation by the state. (Wilcox, Ault, & Agee 129). First, proponents say that licensing would define the practice of public relations, while opponents contend that it is too difficult to define public relations rigidly enough to legally regulate its practice.

Second, both those for and against agree that licensing would set uniform ethical standards. However, licensing does not assure high ethical behavior. The credibility and status of an occupation are not necessarily guaranteed through

licensing. Attorneys, for instance, do not particularly enjoy high public status and prestige because they are licensed. Nor do licensed practical nurses. Third, many believe licensing would protect the consumer of public relations services (clients and employers) from the impostors and the inept. Opponents point out that civil and criminal laws already exist to deal with malpractice, or the impostors.

Proponents claim that since licensing would not control anyone's right to deal with the media, government, or public, or to speak out in any way, no infringement of First Amendment rights would be involved. However, opponents believe that any licensing in the communications field is an infringement on the First Amendment, as the government could actually control practitioners.

Finally, those for licensing state that it would establish uniform educational curricula. Those opposed conclude that too much emphasis would then be placed on education.

In addition to these contentions, opponents offer further justification for their opinion. They think that voluntarily adhering to the professional organizations code would be sufficient to establish standards. The codes to which they are referring are those created by professional associations, such as the PRSA, the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), and the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ). Members of these organizations are expected to follow these sets of standards.

Next, licensing would be a states function, and public relations people often work on a national and international basis. Furthermore, the machinery required for the government to license and police all public relations practitioners in this country would be elaborate and very costly to the American taxpayer.

In a final argument, proponents reason that, if medical doctors have defined themselves and have accepted a different paradigm of professionalism than have chiropractors and faith healers, then practitioners, in accordance with the state, can define and protect this definition of public relations (Kruckeberg 23). Opponents claim that legislators show little or no interest in licensing public relations, since the health and welfare of the general public are not directly at stake.

In addition, this analogy of comparing public relations professionals to medical doctors is inappropriate. This is because of the First Amendment-type rights which prohibit the exclusion of others to the performance of most types of public relations activities. Public relations is considered part of the mass communications field, and practitioners do not feel that anyone should be able to regulate what they say or do.

A more befitting comparison would be between public relations counselors and Certified Public Accountants, because, like public relations, not all of the activities of accounting practitioners can be exclusionary or limited to those in professional positions (Kruckeberg 24). In other words, it is common for ordinary people, as opposed to professionals, to utilize many of the activities involved in both public relations and accounting. In my opinion, this point wins the argument for those opposed to licensing, and leads to a more realistic solution, proposed by public relations people: the development of a universal code of ethics, self-binding to all practitioners. Ethics codes in public relations do currently exist. One such code was created by the PRSA. However, this code is neither general enough nor does it encompass enough practitioners to solve the immense ethical dilemma faced by practitioners, as will be illustrated in the next section.

### **The PRSA Code of Professional Standards**

Most professional organizations and many businesses have codes of ethics, which are intended to set acceptable norms of behavior for working professionals and employees. The public relations field is no exception. Several public relations organizations have created ethical codes and hold their members responsible for upholding these standards.

The Public Relations Society of America is one such organization that has a highly regarded code. Adopted in 1950, the PRSA Code of Professional Standards for the Practice of Public Relations was a fore-runner in the field and remains highly regarded due to its longevity. The society was established in 1948 its primary mission being the unification of the public relations profession. Its first concern, according to the late Rea W. Smith, former executive vice president, was the development of an ethical code so that its members would have behavioral guidelines; management would have a clear understanding of standards; and professionals in public relations would be distinguished from shady promoters

and ballyhoo advance men who, unfortunately, [had] been quick to appropriate the words public relations to describe their operations. (Wilcox, Ault & Agee 117)

This code consists of 17 articles dealing, for instance, with fairness toward clients, employers, and the public; with intentional communication of false or misleading information; and with engaging in practices that corrupt the channels of communication or processes of government. If a complaint is made about a member by a peer, that person is investigated by the society's Board of Ethical and Professional Standards. These findings are reviewed, and punitive actions can be made by the board of directors. The PRSA may expel, suspend, censure, or reprimand a member, depending on what aspect of and how seriously the code was violated.

Enforcement of these standards is effective. However, only about ten percent of the estimated 15,700 public relations professionals in the United States are members of the PRSA. In addition to encompassing only one out of every fifteen practitioners, the society can take no legal actions against violators. The only thing the code jeopardizes is the practitioners membership status. No news releases are made about a terminated member, so little damage can be done to the persons career. Therefore, this code, although good in theory, is not really that effectual. Only a universal code of ethics, encompassing all practitioners, will be able to do the job.

### **Development of a Universal Code of Ethics as a Solution**

Public relations does not have to become a legally protected profession or be governmentally licensed and regulated. Rather, a professional model similar to that of Certified Public Accountants could be used. No indomitable obstacles impede the development of a binding code for the public relations professional community, although it might be a logistically difficult and sobering task. Creating a universal ethical code is both a reasonable and an essential task, if one expects public relations practitioners to ever gain the respect they might actually deserve (Kruckeberg 21). Whenever someone tries to implement something new or attempts to make progress/ there are always people ready-and waiting to contradict the idea or squelch the movement. In the case of developing a universal ethics code for public relations, these people are ignorantly preventing a phenomenal plan which could free the term public relations ethics from being considered an oxymoron.

The first argument opponents have against a universal code is that there may be considerable differences of opinion, globally, about what constitutes ethical practice by those public relations professionals practicing within different social/cultural/geopolitical systems (Kruckeberg 22). However, more similarities between cultural values exist than some realize. Kruckeberg (26) states that central moral aspirations in nearly all cultures include: life, social order, family protection from arbitrary rule, prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment, the guarantee of a place in the life of the community, and access to an equitable share of the means of subsistence.

For example, in all cultures, parents have duties toward their children, and children have duties to their parents; everywhere gratitude is regarded as good, the miser is despised, and the man of generous spirit is held highly. Rather than throwing up ones hands and declaring that they do things differently in other countries, it would be useful to put forth a general code and let its interpretation and use suggest further refinements that will help adapt it to the nuances of the global community (Hunt & Tirpok 9).

A second argument is that of conflicting codes. Many public relations practitioners find themselves covered by more than one code specific to their workplace, in addition to one or more codes resulting from membership in professional associations. However, in a study of numerous codes conducted in 1985, it was found that similar themes of accuracy, objectivity, truthfulness, and completeness recurred in all, indicating that ethics codes do not change substantially from organization to organization (Hunt & Tirpok 4). Furthermore, the purpose of creating a universal code is not to eliminate individual, existing codes. Rather, a universal code would serve as an umbrella, broadly covering ethical points and setting standards. Practitioners could still adhere to those codes set by their employers or professional organizations.

Next, some practitioners ask, What's the use? The ten percent who are unethical will spoil it for all by their refusal to adhere to ethics. However, if leaders in the field have the connections and mechanism that help them to speak out and declare to the public that such behaviors are not the norm and are not ethical according to accepted standards, then public perception can be changed. To give up on the idea of a universal code is to concede to the public their view that



practitioners accept a lack of ethics as the norm for public relations (Hunt & Tirpok 8).

Finally, critics of the universal code argue that such a code would be meaningless due to the lack of legal power to enforce ethical behavior (Kruckeberg 22). This is true, but the purpose of creating a code is not to legally regulate practitioners. The success of a universal ethics code adopted by organizations would depend largely on the acceptance and compliance of members rather than enforcement. It would take a number of years to get all practitioners involved; in the long run, those who do not abide by the standards would find it impossible to get a job. This point is discussed further below in the section titled The Timetable for Developing the Universal Code.

### **The Framework of a Universal Code**

Both the framework for such a code and the timetable for its implementation have been critically thought about. Hunt and Tirpok (8) suggest that the best ways to move the field toward consideration of a universal ethics code would be for someone to draft such a code and present it for discussion. Such a code would need to be generic enough to cover the various activities that public relations entails, as well as globally-differing ethical standards.

The draft would have to begin with an appeal to public relations practitioners to keep faith with the public (8). Also, in the preamble, the profession must be defined, and that definition should include the modern perception of public relations as a two-way symmetrical process. This means that communication is not only disseminated from public relations people to the publics, but feedback from the publics to the practitioners is equally as important. The introduction would explain that first-order concerns and issues, not the specifics of a particular ethical situation, would be dealt with by the code.

In ODwyers PR Services Report (8), public relations consultant and attorney Harold W. Suckenic recently proposed some key issues that could be dealt with simply and clearly. He argued that the need of clients, publics, journalists, and public relations firms would all be served by such straightforward statements as:

- I will not represent a client who is not truthful with me or the news media.
- I will not represent a client who takes a position opposed to my personal beliefs (e.g., the cigarette company example given earlier).
- I will not represent a client who wants to conceal his or her real identity. I will not represent a client who does not allow me to disclose that I represent this client.
- I will not represent a client whose name is misleading as to the source of funding or motivation of his/her group.
- I will not take on as a client someone who refuses to meet the media face-to-face. Neither I nor my client will obstruct or dodge those media.

Most of these suggested rules seem to concern the tracing of accountability of practitioners. They are general enough that they would cover the different duties practitioners must perform and would not conflict with individual organizations codes of ethics.

### **The Timetable for Developing the Universal Code**

Once the contents of a universal code have been seriously discussed, an inevitable question must be asked: Is it possible for the concept to leave the talking stage and enter the development stage? The answer is Yes. Hunt and Tirpok (9-10) suggest a well-thought out timetable.

During phase one, which is anticipated to last one year, a group of interested academics seeks foundation or corporation funding for a two-day conference on drafting the universal code. Academics and representatives of public relations organizations are invited to attend the conference. The first day of the conference is devoted to invited papers. The second day is a working session, with breakout groups working on different sections of the code, and a final plenary session for the purpose of assembling a draft of the code. In the second phase, a duration of two years, a task force is created to visit all of the concerned professional organizations to make presentations on the draft of the universal code. They will accept suggestions for modification, implementation, and dissemination of the code. Phase three, lasting two years, includes the ratification and implementation of the code by the participating public relations organizations.

In the final, one-year phase, the universal code would be published. A publicity campaign would be launched to inform target publics (such as the journalists, students, and practitioners who perceive public relations as being unethical) about the code and its importance to global public relations. Assessment of the impact of and the reaction to the code will suggest the next phases of the timetable to gain acceptance for the Universal Code of Ethics. Over time, the code will become common knowledge to those seeking the services of public relations practitioners just as those who have not adopted the code will be recognized. Eventually, those who choose not to abide by its prominent principles will no longer be able to find employment.

## Conclusion

Public Relations is a field which is viewed with much skepticism by the American public, journalists, students, and even public relations practitioners. In order for public relations to survive as a profession, actions must be taken to change the unethical image these people hold of public relations. Several solutions have been offered by practitioners, including instilling moral values in the home, educating about ethical/unethical behavior, hiring more honest practitioners, rewarding and publicizing good conduct, and governmentally regulating the licensing of practitioners. All of these propositions are unfeasible, be it because the solution would be too difficult to implement, or because it is an infringement of First Amendment rights.

The way to reverse the unethical perception of public relations is to develop a universal code of ethics. None of the four arguments popularly cited against a universal code is problematic to such a task. A universal code, in fact, can be devised which will be satisfactory to those within different social/cultural/geopolitical systems, notwithstanding the gray areas of cultural values which may be present within such specific systems.

Public relations practitioners should establish a professional model similar to that of Certified Public Accountants, recognizing that much of what they do professionally cannot be exclusionary. Globally, they can be confident that there is a plenitude of shared ethical values, and those which are within differing areas of moral taste can be discussed, universally accepted or negotiated. A universal code of professional ethics for public relations is conceivable. It should be pursued.

## Works Cited

- Hunt, Todd, and Andrew Tirpok. Universal Ethics Code: An Idea Whose Time Has Come. *Public Relations Review* Spring (1993): 1-10.
- Kruckeberg, Dean. Universal Ethics Code: Both Possible and Feasible. *Public Relations Review* Spring (1993): 2130.
- Pratt, Cornelius B. PRSA Members Perceptions of Public Relations Ethics. *Public Relations Review* Summer (1991): 145-59.
- . Public Relations: The Empirical Research on Practitioner Ethics. *Journal of Business Ethics* 10 (1991): 229-34.
- Shamir, Jacob, Barbara Straus Reed, and Steven Connell. Individual Differences in Ethical Values of Public Relations Practitioner. *Journalism Quarterly* Winter (1990): 956-63.
- Wilcox, Dennis, Phillip Ault, and Warren Agee. *Public Relations Strategies and Tactics*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc., 1992.

## Resources

- Bivins, Thomas H. Public Relations, Professionalism, and the Public Interest. *Journal of Business Ethics* 12 (1993): 117-28.
- Kruckeberg, Dean. The Need for an International Code of Ethics. *Public Relations Review* Summer (1989): 6-18.
- Mencher, Melvin. *Basic Media Writing*. Dubuque: Wm. C. Brown Communication, Inc., 1993.



# Generation What? An Outcast of Generation X

Amye Hommel

*Reflecting upon my writing is one of the most difficult tasks I have ever been asked to do. Looking back upon my work, I realize that this is one of the most important papers I have written. Not only was this piece the first paper I have written for a writing studio, it also enabled me to release some of the frustrations I have with my generation.*

Generation X. Slackers. Twentysomethings. There has been so much written about this group. There have been countless attempts by the media to analyze them. The media panders to and laughs at them, almost in the same breath. They discuss the group's alienation and disaffection, and their pride in multiculturalism. The media mocks their seemingly constant depression and applauds their tolerance and open-mindedness. Movies such as *Reality Bites* and *Singles* show this group in all its glory. Most people in this age group watch these movies and feel a connection with them. The backdrops of these characters' lives, and the experiences these characters face are similar to their own. However, I, as well as many of my peers, cannot relate to any of the so-called "Generation X" movies, TV shows, music, etc. While we are all in the correct age group, these forms of entertainment are for the products of a white, middle-class, suburban upbringing. This category leaves out a considerable amount of young Americans.

The whole concept of a Generation X reminds me of junior high school, where knowing the right people, wearing the right clothes, and listening to the right music means status and popularity. Back in junior high, there was the popular crowd rich kids, athletes, and beautiful people. These popular people had one thing in common conformity. They all wore the same type of clothes with the same brand names. They went to all the socially key functions parties, dances, etc. As much as twentysomethings would like to think they have progressed beyond this point, they have not. Generation X also has a popular crowd. Instead of going to the socially key parties, they attend concert events like Lollapalooza and Woodstock '94. Instead of going out of their way to look like everyone else, they go out of their way *not* to look like everyone else and end up looking like everyone else in the process. The audience at a Lollapalooza concert is a study in nonconformist conformity. Both sexes wear baggy jeans, flannels, and stupid t-shirts. When I write "stupid" it is not just my opinion the wearer thinks the shirt is stupid as well, precisely the reason he or she is wearing it. These t-shirts must be worn with a sense of irony. If the wearer is male, the t-shirt must be oversized. If the wearer is female, the t-shirt must be undersized. Regardless of who is wearing the shirt, it is vital that the shirt not look extremely new. One type of stupid t-shirt that appears to be gaining popularity is the baseball style t-shirt with the iron-on decal of a rock band. These were extremely popular back in the late '70's and early '80's. By wearing the shirt, one *appears* not to care about fashion, and yet looks very fashionable indeed. Other essential accessories include body piercing and tattoos. It is no longer enough to have a pierced ear or nose to be considered truly "unique", one must have a pierced navel, lip, tongue, eyebrow, and nipple. Tattoos are popular as well, especially ones that involve enduring excruciating pain while receiving them. Those who wear these fashions claim they are trying to be different from the "norm" and that they are rebelling from the mainstream. However, like the junior high school competitions to see who could be the most popular, Generation X battles to see who can be the most different and/or "alternative."

The competition does not stop with the clothes one wears. It continues in the music one listens to. Until the emergence of the idea of a Generation X, groups such as Soundgarden and Pearl Jam (as Mother Love Bone) did not get much airplay on the radio or sell many records. In fact, if one was a fan of these groups (which at the time were few and far between) and one wished to read about them, one would have to read "heavy metal" rock magazines such as *Circus*. Of course, Mr. and Ms. Generation X would never buy a heavy metal magazine or listen to heavy metal music, because it is good to be different, but not too different. The correct kind of different is what gets respect these days. Owning a Tony Bennet CD is the aural equivalent to the stupid t-shirt it is listened to

with irony. Owning a Yanni CD, however hard one tries, could not be listened to with irony, because it is the wrong kind of different. Bands with the right kind of different quality include Pearl Jam, Nirvana, Stone Temple Pilots, and Smashing Pumpkins. All these bands are consistently marketed as "alternative" bands, but each group has sold millions of records. How alternative can a band possibly be if their albums go platinum? Fans of these groups argue that the music is different than the music that is played on the radio. At one time, this argument had merit. However, now it is difficult to find a radio station that targets youth that does not play any songs by these bands. Clearly, there is an alternative mainstream when music is in question.

The quest for alternativeness does not end there. It crops up in the most unusual places, such as home decor. Granted, the typical twentysomething person cannot afford a palatial estate with luxurious furnishings. However, the way some choose to dress their homes is like the way they choose to dress themselves- stupid, but worn with irony. Walter Kirn points this out in his essay, "Twentysomethings." He criticizes an article in *Details* magazine about the bedroom decor of young men:

Paolo, described as a "sound engineer/motor cycle racer", takes obvious pride in his wacky scavenging, in the fragments he has shored against his ruin: "I found the dentist's chair on the street; the sofa is the back of a van." Then there's Craig, a "graphic designer/DJ" (the cute juxtapositions never end), who boasts: "The trunk's from a

thrift shop, the cowhide rug was a gift." The implication, of course, is that one can never be too aware of the ironic signals one is sending, even while alone, in private. ( 230)

ead as all the other characters, for that is the only way Generation X can achieve the goal of multiculturalism.

If one does not fit the Generation X mold- young, gorgeous, alternative, white, middle-class one cannot be invited to the Generation X party. The competition to see who can be more alternative, more ironic, more alienated has grown to ridiculous proportions. However, for those of us on the outside looking in, this is not an issue, for we have no expectations for us to live up to. Since we are not part of the alternative

Probably one of the more frustrating aspects of this group is hearing how alienated and misunderstood they are as a whole. Some X-types truly are alienated and as misunderstood as they claim to be, having been victims of child abuse or *truly* dysfunctional, loveless families (*not* the new definition of dysfunctional family, which everyone seems to be a part of). However, most "alienated" types seem to believe alienation comes from moping around as if it were a badge of honor, something to take pride in. Often, they align themselves with oppressed ethnic groups, claiming they can understand their pain. It is also trendy to be part of an oppressed minority, thanks to the efforts of the faux-alienated.

Although minority status is desirable in Generation X, there is very little minority representation. Token minorities on TV shows or in movies are quite typical. The token minority almost always falls into one of two categories: 1) a stereotype, such as a Black college student whose sole purpose is not to get an education, but to play basketball (as on *Beverly Hills, 90210*) or 2) an extremely underdeveloped character whose primary functions are to be scenery for the main characters and occasionally to offer advice when someone else is in crisis (as on *Models, Inc.*). These characters are never the focus of the show. They are usually relegated to sideshow, subplot status. Of course, no matter what the character is like, they cannot be too Black or Latino or Asian. They can occasionally stand up for themselves when a grave injustice has been committed against them because of their skin color, but they must never take too much pride in their history and culture. For instance, the Black college student can be on the basketball team, but he could not be a member of the Black Students Union. Regardless of their skin color, they must act just as whitebr

mainstream, we are the true alternativesomething Generation X could never be in their wildest dreams.

# Work Cited

Kirn, Walter. "Twentysomethings." From *Signs*

*Of Life In The U.S.A.: Readings on Popular Culture for Writers*. Eds. Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon. Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1994: 229-231.

## Refuge

Amy Meadows

*This task was put before me; to tell of an experience or part of my life that has helped shape my identity. I wanted to make it so you could look past the black lines on this flat page and feel my world; how I touch it and taste it and live it and know it. So here's a trip to my world, taken from my mind, seen through my eyes.*

### Preface/Foreword

Every night when I lie down to sleep, I can hear the continuous, buzzing echo of the day's residue. The cacophony of sound that gets trapped in my head all day long begins its slow release: the ringing of phones like calculated screams, the falling of fingers on key boards like pelting leaden raindrops, people barking orders at me as if they were the only masters I am obliged to serve.

The faces of these monsters I see in my mindwarped and twisted, still yelling, demanding, screeching. They circle around and taunt me. It is guilt that makes it so my eyes are wide and bloodshot while my mind throbs and my body aches for sleep. I should stay awake longer. . .there is more I can accomplish, more work to be done. I can push myself just a little bit more and I should. A go-getter wants more from herself than others expect, and the monsters are an ample challenge; they're insatiable. There is a fun house in my mind and all I want to do is sleep.

Every day my alarm sounds, my eyes crack open. I throw the covers off and feel the surge of frigid air, tired and grumpy and cursing the day for its fast arrival. It seems as if I never slept...all my days are like those before them, separated only by the nightmares that mirror them.

My body craves a shower but the clock on the wall says "No." I gather together the assignments that kept me up well past the change of day and hope they are as good as they seemed at 3:45 a.m. My stomach rumbles with indigestion from the 2 a.m. pepperoni and olive pizza. I grab a stale but clammy slice from the cardboard box on the floor and head out the door.

This is the start that propels me into my day. By 7:30 am I am roaming the streets, video camera in hand, searching for the latest news. It is my job to pry into miserable people's lives to disclose the boring facts about their boring lives. And *they* get frustrated and angry with *me*? Deadline is 11:30, but my six-hour class marathon begins at 10:00; at best I'm allotted two and a half hours to film, script, and edit a news package for the class that will make or break me as a broadcast journalism major.

10:00, time for class: *Depth Psychology and Religious Ethics...The Philosophy of Psychology*. . . need I say more? My veins are surging with caffeine and I try to make sense of the tangled words and labyrinthine ideas. My brain is racing and roaring and all I'd like to do is rest. At 5:20 class is dismissed and the dinner bell rings. An early evening nap would be nice just to freshen my senses and spirit, but time is ticking and my work shift starts at 7:00 p.m.

I'm a radio announcer. I get to spend five hours a day (eight on the weekend nights) totally surrounded by, and submerged in, noise. What was once pleasant music to me now has the same unfriendly bite to it as the other elements in my daily ritual that give me *The Headache*. It starts as a low, rhythmic pulsing at the base of my neck. It spreads like cancer through my head, the throbbing increasing in frequency and in intensity until external sounds are hardly distinguishable from those in my own mind. I do not feel at home in my own body; I need a refuge.

### Refuge

I love the song of autumn, nearly autumn, when the season is advanced enough for crisp morning air, but not yet late enough for the birds to have disappeared. There's the melodic, high pitch of these creatures, joining each other for one last chorus before departing for the southland. The twinkling sound of the leaves are like rain as they laugh with each other and dance around. The trees wave their arms to welcome me.

One by one and sometimes in two's or three's the leaves will jump off the branches to a graceful descent, rocking back and forth along the air currents until settling on the ground below. There the leaves will lay with the rest of their kind, trembling with every gust that speaks to them. When a mighty wind passes through, a daring group will leap into the air and follow it, circling upward in its invisible force back toward the branches they once clung to.

But others just remain at the base of the tree, stuck together and hugging the ground. They seem as contemplative as I am about the coming of winter. They shuffle around on the ground, red and brown, making a sort of sizzling sound. All these sounds are sweet and welcome as I take a walk through the woods. And, like a score of music, there's a pattern, a rhythm. It's powerful and it's subtle, dynamic and delicate, and it soothes me like nothing else.

There's me. The sound of my walking, the crumpling, cracking, snapping of twigs under the weight of my stride. There is the rumbling of little rocks as I kick them on ahead of me. Occasionally, I'll send one of them bouncing and tumbling down the ravine. I can hear it colliding with the terrain as gravity relentlessly drags it downward until it lands with a *plink* in the bubbling stream. It's water I can't see, but its existence I am certain of. Its talk is ceaseless, an anxious, urgent rumbling.

There's the *zip*. . . *zip*. . . *zip* of my jeans; they rub together with each step I take. And now and then I'll sniffle--my nose always gets runny in the cool and crunchy autumn air. Usually by mid-walk my stomach is growling, protesting my neglect. My breathing becomes labored and my lungs begin to whistle. This is disrupted only by intervals of grunting as I negotiate the upward slopes of the path. Sometimes when the wind ceases to blow for a moment and I stop to look around I can hear myself blink I can actually hear the clicking of my eyelids as they come together.

I marvel at the power of the wind, the authority it claims as trees bend and leaves and twigs jump out of its way. It's big and it's arrogant and it's sweeping, or it's a whistling breeze passing you by for things beyond, or it's a howling echo in your ear. I close my eyes and feel it as it tickles my ears and slides its pointy fingers through my hair. It caresses my face with a whisper. I smell it, fresh and musky, and I taste it--it's clean. From it I draw my life and I am invigorated.

I don't wear a watch when I'm camping because it really doesn't matter what time it is. There is no one I need to check in with, no appointments that I must keep. I feel as though I'm ignoring some authority, and maybe as if I'm defying it. I'm far from the earshot of orders and requests and demands inaccessible to those wild dogs that snarl and snap at their cages, drool glistening on their greedy teeth, waiting for me to return so the wretched routine can resume.

There's no "real" time when I'm out in the wild just sunrises and sunsets. Nature follows cycles, like that of the sun and of the seasons, and though clocks were meant to illustrate this for us, they have instead overshadowed it and taken its place. For me, this manifests itself as my most vehement stressor: dead lines. Everything I do is so time-specific, so rushed, so urgent. My life is a series of goals, strung together by minor gratification for their attainment. So the world goes, I suppose. But for camping there is no specific, hard and fast goal, no single thing that will make or break or define the trip. And yet the reward is always great.

Once in a while I like to find a level place on the ground so I can melt. I lie on my back, stretch my arms out to each side and relax, letting my body sink as far into the ground as I can. I think of it as melting because that's the sensation I get; my body just seems to soften and take the shape of the ground beneath it. A great time to melt is at night when the stars freckle the sky, trailing off into eternity, and the moon smiles down with a welcoming, soothing glow. Lying out in the stars in the middle of the woods always reminds me of, and makes me thankful for, what stars really are: a true and natural blessing from God. I must say there could be no other explanation for things so vast, so curious, so fantastic.

It seems to be coming into focus what camping is all about to me: sensing. It's about sitting back, taking in, feeling, enjoying, living, thinking. It's really a chance for me to unwind, relax, recuperate, recharge, replenish that hidden source of strength that slowly gets depleted from the toll of life's stressors. It's a chance for me to get my mind back in order. It's a reality check; it puts things into perspective. *What's really important? What is worth stressing over? What should I be working for in life and toward what goal? What really makes me happy?*

For the most part, though temporary as it may be, I resolve these questions each time I take the trip. I usually end up coming to the conclusion that the hypothetical pleasures of life have become complicated, that people have lost sight of the most natural joys, ironically those that yield the most true and lasting pleasure. In light of this, I resolve that I must make adjustments that will eliminate some of the stress I encounter. My intent is to revise my philosophy of life, putting a greater emphasis on pleasing myself and my maker. I try not to set perfection as a standard and defeat as an ugly beast. Obviously, though good thoughts they are, these intentions crumble upon return to "normal" life. Once I'm back in that fast-paced, competitive ring again, my mind jumps back into the race, stress once again clamps onto those muscles in my neck with its vise-like grip, and I'm off and running.

I guess when I'm surrounded by the natural world I can pretend that's all there is. Feeling that constant sense of euphoria that comes with the enjoyment of this time, it naturally follows that I feel that's all there really needs to be. At one time, for some people, I'm sure this was the case. Simplistic and naive it would be for me to think I would last in such an environment for long. Despite all the whining and complaining I do about the rushed, demanding nature of my life, I know I would go crazy if things were any different.

If I take a moment to do some serious introspection, it becomes clear to me that much of the stress that dispirits me is self-inflicted. In the figurative sense, those monsters that claw at my back in the waking hours and keep me from sleep at night do not exist to the extent with which I've chosen to portray them. I have high standards for what and when and how I accomplish what I do. I don't know, maybe it's not enough for me to have self-satisfaction/gratification as a motivation. It seems easier to push myself and reach a goal if there is the illusion of someone else standing by, cracking the whip. When I do things for other people I like to do them well and in as short a time as I can without compromising my standards and, whether or not it legitimately exists, I feel an external pressure to do so.

So though I've told it differently, it's not so much that nature gives me an escape from the unfair, unsympathetic, slave-driving people of my daily routine. It's that it lets me get away from the person I become in the goal-oriented world of appointments and deadlines. When I'm alone in the wild, there's no need (and no real way) for me to be proactive. I just don't feel the nagging compulsion to sort things out and get things done. I am forced to be reactive, a passive element in the woods. I'm a guest there; it's like I've entered someone else's world, a place where I don't completely understand the rules. There's a sort of anxious excitement in just sitting back and watching nature take its natural course. There's something unique and enchanting about the fact that nothing man could contribute could improve the way and quality of this natural life as it stands it's a system of true harmony. Or is it?

Some, upon reading this text, would wonder if this part of the world which I have so glorified is the same one they

know. When I'm camping, does everything really look and sound like Sherwood Forest or the scene from a Disney classic? The answer is that it really doesn't matter. Even if this place has been idealized in my mind, that doesn't change the role it has played or the purpose it has served in my life. I don't doubt that my mind accentuates much of what I see, but I think that adds a sort of mystical quality that serves only to heighten the enjoyment I derive from such a peaceful setting.

And so it seems that camping has become a sort of refuge for me, the perfect opportunity to escape the madness of my everyday life. It lets my senses swim freely in a stream of perception, to capture all that is daily drowned out by the rattles and screams of the world. And it lets my heart be light.



# INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND THE INTERNET: THE CYBERSPACE WORLD OF NET.RELATIONSHIPS

by Cheryl Stafford

*It was my own involvement in the Internet medium that led me to analyze the validity of the relationships that I had formed over the network. I had to take a step back and evaluate the ties that I had formed with people I had never seen and whose voices I had never heard, but whose likes, dislikes, fetishes, fears, and aspirations were worn on their sleeves. Even now, it is difficult to look back and decide what was real and what was falsely facilitated by the Internet. I've since broken the habit and only remain in contact with one net friend. But for millions of people, this alternate society is a vivid reality.*

[NOTE: All text from Internet correspondence is in its original form. All typos and misspellings are the authors.]

*Welll. . . lets see. . . Achilles (Nick) and I met through this thing [QuartzBulletin Board System] just kind of by accident. We started talking and realized that we had a lot in common. I think it started out as a contest of some sort. He had to make me laugh and I had to make him blush. (kindasilly, huh?) The thing is. . . we had both always figured that only dorks with no life got involved with each other this way, so I was REALLY reluctant to carry it over into real life. But, after a month of being in constant contact through Email, things started to progress. We exchanged pictures (hes gorgeous, btw) and hes planning a trip out here in Maybe (hes in Ohio, Im in NH) for my friends wedding.*

This authors real identity is hidden. Other members of the BBS know her as Singen. She is a 20-year-old who attends Keene State College in New Hampshire. Achilles is a 22-year-old at the University of Cincinnati. They have been in nearly constant communication for nearly two months. Singen and Achilles are among thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of net couples that have evolved from contact in social networked settings. This network through which they communicate links computers and humans all over the world.

Many are drawn to the networks because of the vast stores of data that are accessible through a simple connection. FTP sites all over the globe store huge amounts of documents ranging in topics from scientific research to music lyrics. Much of this information can be located through menu-driven indexes such as Archie and Veronica. Others use gophers or other network facilities to interface literally with hundreds of services and databases. However, as people have logged on to the network for the information it makes available, there has been a steady increase in the development and use of the networks as a social forum. Social connections range from business relationships perhaps people who correspond over a network in order to complete a job transaction or to carry out a task to, as we saw in Singen and Achilles case, romances.

More than just shooting the breeze with other hapless strangers wandering around in a bulletin board service or a chat line or a Multi-User Dungeon, a respectable number of users are forming romantic relationships with other people whom they have never met at least not face-to-face. Most users agree net friendships are common, but attachments which people dub net relationships, primary research indicates, are not analogous to face-to-face romantic relationships.

Personal testimony as well as published theory and opinion indicate that relationships whose primary channel of communication is the Internet do not develop into typical romantic relationships until both parties have made face-to-face contact and explored the possibility of romance in much the same way as relationships that originate in real life and real time. It seems to be true, though, that the computer helps a couple to lay out the ground work, so to speak, in gaining information about each other.

By far the biggest computer network is the Internet. The Internet consists of a collection of high-speed networks connected through a backbone provided by the National Science Foundation and a hierarchy of more than 5000 attached, regional, state, federal, campus, and corporate networks (Fraase 10). But there is so much more there than cold computer connections wires, plugs, adapters. There is more there than a giant database. The Mac Internet Tour Guide, states that the Internet is much more than a network of networks. Its also much more than a huge repository of

information. The Internet is a virtual community, existing only ephemerally in physical reality (Fraase 5). At least 1.3 million computers have Internet addresses used by more than 30 million people in more than 40 countries (Cooke 61), and it is growing every day. The number of computers attached to the Internet has doubled every year between 1988 and 1992. In 1993, the rate decreased to 80 percent (Cooke 61).

As the numbers of users grow, so does the diversity of this community. Now, the Internet is much more widespread and accessible to everyday people, not just the scientists, academics, and government officials it originally served. Its very nature of providing high-speed transfer of data between any two networked computers in the world has led this resource to become an important channel of communication. Today, the Net is used in the same way mail, telephones, and fax machines are used.

The Internet began within the Defense Department. In 1969, the Pentagon's Advanced Research Projects Agency created ARPANET, a computer networking project, to transmit packets of military data securely and efficiently around the world. In 1984, The National Science Foundation built five super-computers around the country for conducting scientific research. In time, Defense Department researchers wanted access to those computers. The NSF hooked them up to the ARPANET and started the avalanche (Cooke 61).

Even then, the system was based upon establishing efficient communication and information access. It was just a bunch of computer scientists talking to one another. Dan Van Belleghem, an NSF employee who connects organizations to the Internet said in a 1993 article in *The Nation*. Eventually, others discovered the usefulness of the Net, particularly educators and people involved in research or administration who wanted to talk to one another, retrieve files, and access libraries on the network (Cooke 61).

Today, Freenets, community-based bulletin boards with capabilities such as e-mail, information services, interactive communication, and conferencing are accessible through public libraries and are increasingly responsible for bringing the Net into the hands of the general public (LaQuey 84).

A popular analogy regarding the Net as a data source is that getting information from the Internet is like taking a drink of water from a fire hydrant. It is true; users access a huge deluge of information with very little effort, using those tools (such as gopher and Archie) mentioned above. However, the primary social channels on the net are a different breed of network resource. They range in purpose from education to pure entertainment. They can be broken down into two general categories: asynchronous and synchronous communication.

## Asynchronous

Asynchronous communication means that communication does not occur simultaneously or concurrently. The most popular form of asynchronous communication is electronic mail. E-mail is an inexpensive and quick alternative to what has been dubbed snail mail, or ordinary ground delivery via the U.S. Postal Service. In a 1993 survey on Internet use, nearly one-third of the respondents said they carried out some kind of collaborative research or work with colleagues via electronic mail (Dern Under 36).

Typically, a user generates and enters a message on his or her personal computer and transmits this message through a telephone-modem connection (or through a direct connection on a directly-networked computer). The message is received and stored in a centralized computer facility and is later received by the addressee through his or her own link to the computer facility (Chesebro 98). All users have a unique user.id, and uniform protocols between networks allow for Internet users to send mail to non-Internet users, and vice versa (Sussman 92). Users can send text-based messages in minutes. This includes text, pictures, sound, and video (Fraase 46-47).

Michael Fraase, an Internet expert and Macintosh lover, cannot rave enough about the wonders of e-mail:

With the exception of gestures, e-mail is arguably the most efficient means of communications yet devised by humans. Because it uses recycled phosphorus in your Macintosh screen, e-mail is ecologically nary a tree and very little energy is used to create, deliver, and read e-mail messages. You can choose to read your e-mail whenever it is most convenient for you, not when it is convenient for someone else. You can scan an electronic in-box full of e-mail faster than you can open a single paper mail envelope. You can easily forward, store or reply to e-mail

messages with the touch of a button. Sending messages to dozens of people is a snap with the multiple addressing capabilities of e-mail. And there are a host of other features that make e-mail one of the most powerful and convenient ways to communicate (45).

Another type of asynchronous communication over the Internet occurs through newsgroups. Newsgroups are essentially electronic discussion groups (Fraase 5). These groups span the globe, and are available at no cost over the Net and for a fee through commercial services such as America Online, Prodigy, or CompuServe (Fraase 109). The groups are highly specialized and cover nearly any topic imaginable. A collection of newsgroups serving Unix users, called USENET, has millions of subscribers and over 7000 active newsgroups (Nichols 45).

The groups are divided into broad categories such as science, sociology, computers, recreation, and more. Some of the most amusing and off-beat topics fall under the alt or alternative classification category. For instance for fans of the children's phenomenon Barney the Dinosaur there is the alt.barney.dinosaur.die.die.die group. Other topics: alt.out-of-body, rec.games.video, alt.conspiracy.jfk, comp.graphics.animation, sci.agriculture.beekeeping, and, of course, alt.sex.

Chatter abounds among the newsgroups. Users develop conversations and arguments that fall under the topic area. Some users are regular contributors, others are known as lurkers because they read what is going on but do not themselves post. The regulars are often well-known and respected by others in the group.

A third form of asynchronous communication is the listserv. Listservs are very similar to newsgroups in that they are discussions oriented around one topic area. They differ, however, in their distribution. Listserv users connect to an index of all groups and then choose which ones they are interested in reading about. People who are interested in listservs have to subscribe specifically to be included on the distribution list. The service is free of charge.

## Synchronous

Synchronous modes of communication are just the opposite of asynchronous; people communicate concurrently, in real time. Three main examples of this type of interaction are bulletin board systems, chat or conferencing channels, and multi-player games.

The first synchronous public forum is in interactive gaming over the Net. There are many varieties, but most are referred to as MUDs or multi-user dungeons. MUDs are essentially text-based virtual reality adventure games. Players interact in real-time and alter the worlds they inhabit as they play. Users communicate throughout the course of events and, as on other types of communications systems, may even agree upon certain times to meet on the Net and play together. It has its own culture, its own myths and legends. There are fantasy games on the Internet that become a world unto themselves for many of the players (LaQuey 109).

A second type of synchronous communication is a type of service popularly known as a BBS. Bulletin board systems, such as the one Singen communicates on, link many users to the ever-changing environment simultaneously. As in newsgroups, users post their contributions to conversations in appropriate rooms which comprise topic areas. In turn, others can read and respond to each other's messages which appear as soon as users enter a save command. Since users are logged on to the system at the same time, it is possible for a typed exchange to take place in almost real time. Many BBSs also have intra-system mail, so that users can leave each other private mail without asking for true identities or Internet addresses (LaQuey 84).

The first BBS system was established in Chicago in 1978. Local computer club members could access the system and leave messages for each other. Over time, BBSs grew to allow groups of individuals to exchange various kinds of information. Now, group discussions can be conducted through formal channels (Chesebro 100). In 1992, *U.S. News & World Report* announced that there were already 45,000 public bulletin boards in the United States, sharing over 11 million users. Undoubtedly, the numbers have only increased since then.

One expert who conducted a study of BBSs in the 1980s said that the BBS constitutes nothing less than an entire society on-line. . . a town, a club, a clique, a fantasy world, a dating system. . . or anything one wants it to be (Chesebro 5).

The final type of synchronous communication is known as Internet Relay Chat. IRC is a real-time chat system that prints on screen the input from all other users tuned into the same channel or topic (Dern *Applying* 118). Chat is analogous to communication via ham radio or CB. Fraase pinpoints its usefulness in describing its similarity to a wide-open international conference call using keyboards instead of phones (Fraase 113). The message is transmitted, received, and then responded to in independent steps, and is therefore not truly simultaneous, but is similar enough to a real-life conversation that it warrants its name (Chesebro 102).

On IRC, topics are as diverse as newsgroups but not as numerous. Many are social, featuring forums on alternative lifestyles, sex, computer games, and sports. Others carry news of world events, scientific discoveries, or politics. Numerous speakers can send messages simultaneously. Others have a nearly immediate opportunity to respond to the discussion.

Each of these different modes of communication has its particular strengths and weaknesses. E-mail is a convenient way to stay in touch with friends and colleagues. MUDs provide gaming entertainment. Chat, BBSs, network news, and listservs put users in touch with others who share similar interests and ideas. All are part of the ever-expanding world of network communication.

## Community

Indeed, the Internet is a virtual world. A journalist in *The New York Times* poetically wrote:

The Internet is the virtual equivalent of New York and Paris. It is a wondrous place full of great art and artists, stimulating coffeehouses and salons, towers of commerce, screams and whispers, romantic hideaways, dangerous alleys, great libraries, chaotic traffic, rioting students and a population that is rarely characterized as warm and friendly. In truth, the Internet and its metropolitan analogues are home to many friendly people (Lewis).

As in high society (or even just common society), regulars among all types of interactive communication on the Net get to know each other. They recognize each other's handles or nicknames; they may recognize each other's political leanings or personal beliefs, based upon what they post or say; they may form cliques or enemies; or they may gain reputations as pranksters or troublemakers.

Tracy LaQuey, author of *The Internet Companion*, a beginners guide to the Net, described this phenomenon clearly:

Put a few million people together anywhere, even in electronic cyberspace, and they'll develop some kind of culture a fabric of shared experiences, shared recreation, shared fears, shared rules of behavior that makes them all feel part of a community (109).

In fact, computer experts have witnessed that the advent of global networking is fragmenting and re-sorting society into virtual communities. Instead of being bound by location, groups of people can now meet in cyberspace, the non corporeal world existing between two linked computers. There they can look for colleagues, friends, romance, or sex (Cooke 61).

Some are looking for more than something superficial. On April 10, 1994, Singen posted this sobering social commentary on Quartz BBS:

[We are] just a bunch of confused and lonely people drifting around looking for something that won't kill us and is mildly amusing at the same time. Can't have sex, can't do drugs, can't drive fast, can't even really speak your mind anymore without being accused of being something you're not. So. . . we come here and look for people who feel the same way and gain a measure of comfort in knowing we're not alone.

Singen is seeking comfort among her own. She believes others are as well. This community, this matching of people with similar needs and desires, is what facilitates communication. Similarly, the community evolved through communication.

Communication depends on community, the existence of a culture. Part of what we call culture is a set of conventions

that define the type of discourse possible between individuals. The culture of communication includes tools used for communication: the software of language, gestures and symbols and the hardware of books, radios, musical instruments, computers and telephones (Fogel 12).

The culture behind the Internet is a relatively complex and esoteric one of abbreviations such as "rothflmao" (rolling on the floor laughing my ass off), "cul8r" (see you later), and "brb" (be right back); of emoticons, designed to indicate emotion in an ASCII (computer encoded) environment; of "netiquette" which governs what is socially acceptable and what is not; of "netspeak" or jargon that is associated with the Internet and networking in general, and more. In this case, the tools through which people communicate are personal computers, modems, and the telephone lines that transmit the encoded data from one place in the world to another.

As in any community, personal relationships form as people get to "know" each other. There is no doubt that real social ties result, even in such a sterile, emotionless environment as that of the Internet. As people increasingly use computers, they develop new types of friendships, "computer friendships," which are based solely on the electronic messages transmitted among them (Chesebro 36). "For [some] users the computer creates new social contacts that could not have existed without computer technologies" (Chesebro 4).

Researchers have concluded that, even though one cannot see the person one is chatting with, interpersonal relationships and friendships can be readily formed through the network. One user reported in a 1982 study: "I have talked to some people for years without knowing where they live or their real names. Yet they are as much a presence in my life as if they were in the room. They are my friends" (Chesebro 5). Merlin, a user on Prism BBS (bbs.fdu.edu) who was among many who contributed their insight and experiences, shares the same feelings. "I know I kinda say friends' a lot [about people I know] over the computer, and it may seem weird, but I do honestly consider a lot of the people that I meet over the computer really close friends."

What is interesting is that these friendships were formed with no or minimal information about users' appearance, nationality, race, location, age, or even, perhaps, gender. Pseudonyms, handles, or nicknames hide true identities and give users an opportunity to be whomever they want (Chesebro 102).

Some claim that computer-mediated contacts can promote deception because users have to use their own discretion about what to tell others about themselves. Some may find it to their amusement or advantage to deceive others. Communication via the computer has been found to reduce a user's sense of personal responsibility for his words or actions. Vanguard, another Prism regular and a junior at Vassar University, is suspicious of some users: "[Y]ou can be whoever you want here so I think you find the people becoming who they want to be rather than who they are. And there's a lack of consequences that can be inviting." Project X echoes Vanguard's warning. "Often we hold up a facade on the computer that is very attractive over the computer. Some very large faults are easily concealed."

Kami, a 20-year-old from Salt Lake City, Utah, wrote of the dangers of opening up to others on the Net for fear of falling prey to such deception:

I am a person that takes everything to heart and believes what people tell me. In the net I think a lot of people are a lot more open and will say anything to you even if they don't mean it. It is really hard to tell whether a relationship is real or not on the net. You really have to be careful and not open yourself up much or else you get hurt. I have.

This is proof enough that people who communicate on the Net form real ties. Kami admitted to caring about others, and, consequently, being hurt when her trust was broken. Merlin and all the others that responded validated the existence of net friendships, strong attachments that exist though the lines of computer terminals.

But are these true friendships in the same sense as you and I are friends with our roommates or neighbors? One author presents a series of pertinent questions:

To what extent are real friendships possible without the immediate presence of another in a person-to-person exchange? If the computer is perceived as one more communication technology that has invaded our personal environment and reduced face-to-face human contact, will loneliness increase? Have communication technologies

been increased in the hope of eliminating loneliness?(Chesebro 36).

Users will argue that, yes, friendships exist and that it can both create a feeling of isolation and stave off feelings of loneliness. But perhaps with this new technology, a new look at the concept of "friendship" is necessary. James Chesebro and Donald Bonsall, who studied computer-mediated communication quite extensively in the 1980's, agree. They made the observation that if the reports of BBS users are taken seriously and confirmed, "it may be essential to redefine the meanings of such words as friendship and interpersonal communication" (Chesebro 6).

Merriam-Webster's definition of friend is "a person attached to another by respect or affection" (16: 303). Clearly, it seems possible for network users to feel affection or respect for another user, even if they have never met. In the ordinary formation of a face-to-face friendship, there are several common characteristics. The relationship is a voluntary one. It is a personal relationship that is privately negotiated between particular individuals. The relationship maintains a spirit of equality. Though each individual may differ in status, ability, attractiveness, age, or other features, some facet of their personalities function as a leveler. A feeling of mutual involvement also exists. "The bonds of friendship result from the collaboration of two individuals in constructing a shared social construct. And, finally, friendship implies affective ties. In other words, friends show caring, concern, and generally give off a positive feeling" (Rawlins 11-12).

Each of these characteristics may be found in net.friendships. Friends choose to keep in touch and actively "meet" on the network. Both contribute something to the relationship, be it support, comic relief, or just a sounding board for new ideas. Of course, over the computer, users' physical features do not influence who pairs up. It is more an attraction of similar tastes and beliefs as expressed through their writing. The social construct that the users share is at least defined by the mode of communication in which they are involved, i.e., if nothing else, users share knowledge of the same set of rules that govern behavior on a MUD or that dictate propriety on a BBS. Finally, user's testimony alone should convince skeptics that Internet users feel affection for others on the network.

Still, these friendships are unlike face-to-face relationships. Chesebro and Bonsall suggest that we have to evaluate other questions as well, such as: "What must friends know about each other before they can say that they are friends? What do friends have to disclose? Regarding the physical nature of another, is there a minimum of information that we must know if we are to call another a friend?" (Chesebro 102).

But these questions are not readily answered. According to two communication specialists, James McCroskey and Thomas McCain, an interpersonal relationship must always involve some kind of judgment about the physical attractiveness of the other (Chesebro 102). However, this is not a universal belief. Joseph DeVito, in *The Interpersonal Communication Book* (1983), defines a friendship in terms of the kind of psychological support the relationship provides: "Friendship may be defined as an interpersonal relationship between two persons that is mutually productive, established and maintained through perceived mutual free choice, and characterized by mutual positive regard" (qtd. in Chesebro 103). Accepting this definition would imply that physical characteristics or attractiveness have nothing to do with friendship.

But can a friendship truly exist if most theories of friendship assume face-to-face encounters among friends? Physical intimacy is often a very important feature of a friendship, but the Net cannot accurately communicate emotions and feelings, let alone physical contact, in a text-only environment. Chesebro and Bonsall admit this void of contact, but support the validity of net.friendships, nonetheless:

They lack the physical intimacy of face-to-face friendship, but computer friends, in our view, will function as powerful psychological relationships at least equal in the importance to many face-to-face contacts, we anticipate that relationships developed through computers will eventually be recognized as a significant form of interpersonal communication and also that an increasing number of people will view their computers as intimate social and emotional companions, a "social" development that will probably remain unadmitted until such relationships can no longer be avoided or ignored ( 235-236).

It seems reasonable, then, to accept that close friendships can form over the network, individuals having never met. However, I do not believe that net.romances can be sustained solely through a network connection. A romantic relationship is in some ways similar to a friendship, but there are necessary components to a romantic involvement that cannot be compensated for over a computer connection. BBSers who contributed their experience agree, indicating that

nearly all net.relationships in which they have been involved have either progressed to a physical, face-to-face realm or have simply dissolved.

Merriam-Webster defines romance as "a romantic attachment or episode between lovers" (635). Love, as a noun, can mean several things: "1. strong affection, 2. warm attachment, 3. attraction based on sexual desire." As a verb, it can mean "cherish or to feel a passion, devotion, or tenderness for" (435).

Nowadays, there are hundreds of outlets on the Net specifically focused on match-making. Prism BBS has a room called the Singles Bar. Typically, BBSs also have a personals room. Some of the most active newsgroups are about sex. There are chat channels about sado-masochism. Sex is a great American and Canadian pastime. Maclean's picked up on this hot topic. Part of its lead painted this picture:

Trading cologne and makeup for a computer and a modem, the lovelorn, and the curious now can communicate intimately with other computer users around the world. And because they typically use an alias, computer courtiers not only avoid exchanging bodily fluids they don't even exchange names. Talk about safe sex (Chidley 46).

The bulletin board users that responded to my informal survey believe they are engaged in real relationships. They vary in degree of intensity, but all feel strong affection and attraction more than they feel toward other net.friends, and to their respective "significant others." How can a person identify when their interactions have gone beyond simple friendship? Onyx, a 20-year-old Prism user from New Jersey, explains:

I guess it becomes a net.relationship when you really talk to the person more than in just passing. . . start having real conversations with them. . . the type you would have with one of your own RL friends. And even meet them and start hanging out with them in that same manner. . . or if they are the opposite sex, then dating them, if that is what it amounts to. . .

Merriam-Webster says this could be love, but is it? Here, the BBSers share their stories:

Merlin, on Quartz BBS:

*I met this girl over on Quartz BBS and we just started talking on there, one of those passing by things, people talking, just getting to know each other. . . friends, like all those regular friends that you can meet on the net. . . we just talked, got to know each other more (soon became more than just casual hi or so . . . just a sense of attraction that I had, and her too). . . went and visited her once. . . it was great, we got to spend time together, etc., and our personalities together in rl [real life] weren't that different from what was online. . . We were just for each other, more friends than anything. . . Anyway, she and I met, and I would say that, at that time, I've never been more. . . complete. . . we have our differences, and similarities, but it's still enough to keep it going. . . and it's been 3 years and 4 months now.*

Merlin found happiness over the Net. Note, though, that his relationship progressed to a physical level before he accepted it as successful.

Another Quartz user must continue her search for love. Victoria, a 21-year-old at Purdue University, met her Net significant other Bill through a mutual friend from aMUD. Bill had been having problems with a female friend, and Victoria lent him an sympathetic ear for five straight hours during their first contact:

*We talked about everything, then we started talking about every day. It was most how's school what are families are like and such. the more we talked the more we wanted to talk so we started talking about 5xs a day, plus sending email when we couldn't talk. And he asked if he could call me. Then we started talking on the phone (long distance) about 4-5 times a week (for long periods of time). But this time we were talking about our future (possibly together) and that went on a while and he asked me if I would consider a future with him. I said I would and he asked if he could come and visit me. I agreed so he came for a visit. About a week later he basically told me to get lost. He said it was because he realized it wouldn't work out cuz we were from two totally different worlds.*

In Victoria's case, face-to-face contact changed the entire relationship. It stopped whatever they felt was between them dead in its tracks.

Undoubtedly well-versed in affairs of the heart similar to Victoria's and Merlin's, Japm, a 24-year-old staff member at Pennsylvania State University, shared some words of wisdom on net.relationships. His theory is to treat them just as a real life relationship.

*If people are looking to start a relationship on here . . . and that is their primary purpose. . . any net relationship will fail as it would in real life. . . if they come on here looking for people to talk to and maybe make some friends and do fall in love with someone and vice versa . . . then it has a good chance of working . . . same as in real life . . . friendship first. . . relationship second . . . if someone is going after a relationship in real life (meaning in person) (i do consider the people on here real, one of the basic things necessary to start something over this) and not looking for anything else, that person, in the overwhelming majority of cases, anything started does not last, because there was never that closeness of friendship, which in my opinion has to be at the base of any successful relationship.*

He operates on the same morals and rules he would in a real life situation.

*I've always treated everything for the most part the same on the net as I would in real life. . . I guess the first thing I did was to realize that there is actually another persona at the other end of the line. . . then proceeded to get to know her. . . but it always went to phone conversations before anything would really develop through here. I guess I've always concentrated on communication. Sometimes it is a problem because you aren't there in person to comfort or the actual emotions are sometimes hard to distinguish over the computer . . . I guess the trick with actually meeting people and such on here for friendship or more is just to be yourself, and I'd say that it is the same as a long distance relationship except that in many cases it may be a while before you actually meet in person. But in reality, if you really care and love the person, after the nervousness wears off, the two should be as they are over the computer. If they can't be both, both need to evaluate how they really feel.*

As is illustrated in the confessions of these BBSers, attitudes and experiences vary widely among users. Some believe what they feel is just as real as any face-to-face relationship. Alaric, a 17-year-old Prism user, feels that "it is possible to meet someone and fall in love with them over the net. It's just that the feasibility of the relationship coming together is very low. . ."

On the other hand, Onyx is a strong non-believer in net.relationships.

*I really don't understand how 2 people can be dating over the computer. . . I don't see how you can be totally committed to one if you don't totally know. So no, I don't believe it can be done.*

Psychonaut, a sophomore communications major at St. Mary's College of California, simply does not equate a network situation to a real life one.

*What is a net.relationship? I do not at all consider it analogous to a real-life relationship in the way that the users are engaging in interpersonal communications through a very sterile medium. I have noticed many times that such things as sarcasm or irony don't translate quite well over e-mail.*

Psychonaut does not dispute that some users feel more affectionately toward other particular users, he simply hesitates to place those relationships on the same level as face-to-face romances. Instead, he views the Net as a way of getting to know others with the possibility of meeting in the future.

*As a form of pre-dating? Definitely, and I would be lying if I were to tell you that I consider myself above such things. I've been regularly corresponding to this wonderful girl at UNR who actually reflects my values, religion, ideas, and (most of) my tastes. I find myself wanting to hang out with her so that we can talk one-on-one. Whether or not it has the capacity to develop romantically, I dunno.*



A comparison in these anecdotes, users draw certain distinctions between expectations of a real-life relationship and of one pursued over the network. This rift occurs because face-to-face and computer-mediated communication systems are dramatically different. Recurrent themes haunt users' tales of net-relationships: difficulty in conveying emotion, frustrating lack of a physical dimension, dearth of information about fellow users. These problems result from the computer connection's inability to perform up to the standard people are used to pursuing in face-to-face confrontations. There are five specific ways in which computer-mediated and face-to-face communication differ. They are based purely upon the mode of communication and are observable without even a study of the contents of the communication itself (Chesebro 58).

## The Channel

The first major difference is the channel through which the message passes. In face-to-face exchanges, both verbal and non-verbal channels are employed. One study found that 93 percent of social meanings conveyed in face-to-face communication were nonverbal; whereas in computer-mediated conversations there is no nonverbal channel. Hence users must translate these so-called social meanings into a verbal mode that can be expressed over the keyboard (Chesebro 58-59).

Merlin expressed his difficulties in communicating:

*I experience problems in the communication department because of inadequacy of the other parts of communication that are missing, emotion, and non-verbal signals, mostly. . . all you're reading now possibly is my words, it probably comes across 'ok' with regard to communication and getting the points across, but it would be better/easier with the emotions or non-verbal signals that might be present.*

An attempted solution has been to create a set of "visual signs intended to simulate the nonverbal facial reactions, emotions, and vocalistic patterns that characterize face-to-face communication" (Chesebro 59). Users recognize these as "smilies" or emoticons. Some common examples:

- :-) Standard Smilie = I'm happy, grin, etc.
- :( Frown
- :\_p Smilie sticking tongue out. Playful, Pffft!
- ;) Wink. Teasing, fun, etc.
- :-/ Concern, dismay, concentration.
- :-O Surprise.
- 8-) Smilie wearing glasses.

No one will argue that smilies do not serve a purpose over the Net, but it is easy to see that they cannot reveal the unique, personal, and spontaneous nonverbal reactions that normally accompany face-to-face interaction. Consider, for a moment:

What is the meaning of a smile? From the perspective of a discrete state model of smiling there are many different meanings of a smile, each discretely different from the others. There are smiles that communicate messages of joy, of achievement, of friendliness, of politeness, and of embarrassment. The message is presumed to be in the smiler, who employs subtle differences in facial expression, gaze direction, and body movement to enhance the probability of sending the message unambiguously (Fogel 28).

No :-) symbol can convey all of that.

## The Discursive Mode

The second blatant difference between computer-mediated and face-to-face communication is in the discursive mode. In face-to-face interaction, verbal communication is typically oral. Vocal quality, pitch, and tone are all important in conveying precise meaning of the messages passed from one person to another. These factors permit a large amount of information to be conveyed efficiently and without the kind of commitment involved in solely written messages (Chesebro 59).

Alternately, in computer-mediated exchange, verbal communication is always in a written form. Several factors are tied into this. Messages must always be input line by line. Asides are indicated through parenthetical comments. "Emotion is hard to communicate on the network. Irony and sarcasm are easily misinterpreted without verbal cues or body language. Similarly, terseness can come across as rudeness. And until we can add italics and bold type to our messages, things are even worse we're limited to ASCII text as the lowest common denominator" (Fraase 119). Responses that would normally be oral must be translated into an understandable written form, such as \*giggle\*, \*snicker\*, \*gag\*, or \*cough\* (Chesebro 59). Other means of indicating tone or inflection have been crudely compiled. For instance, capital letters indicate shouting and should be used sparingly. Since, as mentioned above, there is no way to italicize type, users can create emphasis by using the underline character (   ) or asterisks ( \* ) on either side of the word or phrase. In other words, on the network, \*not\* is more polite than NOT (Fraase 119). Regardless of their effectiveness at communicating certain meaning, they all require greater concentration in typing than they would in face-to-face interaction.

## Feedback

The third glaring difference between face-to-face and computer-mediated communication is in receiving feedback. In face-to-face exchange, verbal communication takes place in turns, with nonverbal response constant and immediate, or synchronistic. Face-to-face communication is characterized as "dynamic, ongoing, ever-changing, and continuous" (Chesebro 69).

The scientific term for this phenomenon is co-regulation. It is "the dynamic balancing act by which a smooth social performance is created out of the continuous mutual adjustments of action between partners. In co-regulated communication, information changes as the interaction unfolds" (Fogel 19).

On the other hand, in a computer-mediated exchange, all feedback is asynchronistic. In a typical chat or bulletin board exchange, for instance, a user types and sends a message. The transmission must be completed before the receiver is able to respond to the sender's message. (Though these modes of communication were defined above as synchronous, for the purpose of this discussion no form of computer communication is truly synchronous.) Of course, sometimes users' messages cross paths, and this leads to confusion or misunderstanding. But, at any time, only one-way transmission are technically possible. And all responses to messages must be based solely upon the verbal messages, since nonverbal cues cannot be transmitted through such a structure (Chesebro 69).

It is for this reason that, with time, users such as Victoria and Bill move to telephone communication that ability to tell a story and to have another interject, laugh, ask questions, and more, all in real time is a desirous one very common to human communication, but one incapable of being attained in a network environment.

## Social Roles of the Participants

In a face-to-face exchange, participants have no choice but to present a complete and immediate sociological composite of themselves. Age, sex, race, nationality, and other information about their places in society, such as occupation, income, and social preferences, are revealed or implied. Speakers have little control over what others perceive. However, in a computer-mediated exchange, users have nearly complete control over what sociological information is conveyed to others. In addition, the user determines the way in which these factors will be characterized. Over the Net, impressions are often initially formed, not on the visual social cues we pass judgment on in face-to-face situations, but on the person's attitudes, ideas, and beliefs as expressed through their writing (Chesebro 61).

Fraase sees this as an advantage of the Internet, terming people's tendency to prejudge an impediment: "Electronic mail eliminates a lot of subtle impediments to effective communication. Judgments based on appearance, voice, or social position are impossible in electronic communications" (Fraase 48). Vanguard agrees: "Being so close to someone's thoughts lets you avoid all distractions (physical appearance, location, timing, clothing, personal habits. . . ) that would often keep you from developing a relationship."

Of course, not all would agree that this is a good thing. For instance, those such as Kami who fear deception might be anxious about the honesty of those they communicate with. In real life, social cues help people form character impressions, but on the Net, information provided by the sources may not always be accurate and may even, as noted

above, be purposefully manipulated to create a false impression. You're eyes will not deceive you in evaluating someone in person, but they may in reading about someone over the Net. Ivory, a student in Pennsylvania and avid Prism user, issues a warning: "RL is very different, and people can only show you so many parts of themselves on the computer. In person is much different, and that's what counts."

## **The Use of Time**

Obviously, face-to-face interactions always occur in real time. Time cannot be manipulated in face-to-face exchange. The moment we speak, move, or form an expression on our faces, the information is transmitted to those involved. "During a face-to-face exchange, every moment counts, and every moment has a particular quality that affects the social relationship" (Chesebro 61).

In a computer-mediated environment, time can be more directly controlled and manipulated. In writing messages using electronic mail, posting in listservs, newsgroups, or BBSs, users can take their time and plan out what they want to write. Indirect, synchronous communication, as through chat, time must still be allotted for message construction and other quirks of network communication such as slow typists, transmission problems, differences in transmission systems, and lag time (Chesebro 62).

For many net users, finally meeting and interacting in real time is a very satisfying turn of events, but for other users, such as Victoria, a face-to-face confrontation can fail miserably even preceded by a very successful interchange over the network.

In sum, it is logical that the mode or method employed to create an interaction dramatically affects the kind of relationship established between people. Face-to-face messages are characterized by "a complex, spontaneous, simultaneous, and immediate collage of verbal, nonverbal, and oral symbols." In contrast, computer-mediated messages are characterized by "written, critical, deliberate, and delayed symbols."

## **One Dimension**

In addition to the real life/computer-mediated differences outlined above, networked communications lacks a physical dimension. The interface systems between human communication and communication via the computer are two different things. An interface is either "a physical surface forming the common boundary of two bodies" or "a connecting unit that allows independent systems to interact and communicate with each other." With human beings, relationships can take numerous forms, each requiring a different style, set of conceptions, and appropriate behaviors. In other words: human behavior is context-dependent (Chesebro 54). Most often the context is determined by your surroundings. At a dinner party with co-workers, a person will act one way, but at a club with friends he or she will undoubtedly behave differently.

In a physical environment there are seven factors that make up a social setting. 1. Your goals, or what you want to achieve, 2. Your roles, as compared to others in that same setting, which affect the encounters you have and how you inter-relate, 3. Your mood, 4. The place; physical factors may affect you; plus, certain situations are bound by certain rules or definitions of propriety, 5. The occasion which sets the tone and will determine what is acceptable and what is not, 6. Rules based upon general social norms and the occasion, 7. Feedback; we constantly adjust our goals, reinterpret our roles, and refine our understanding of rules, in light of people's reactions to what we say and do in the situation (Marsh 18-19).

On the other hand, computers operate in a context-free environment and "are immune to circumstance, social ordering systems, and the rules that govern cultural systems." In a sense, computers create a new frame of reference for understanding information free of social boundaries established by human beings (Chesebro 54). Many of the seven factors listed above take on new meaning in a computer environment. For instance, users' roles on the Net are defined by themselves, whereas they may be defined by society in a face-to-face situation. The place is cyberspace, or essentially whatever the users make it. Interactive games and some bulletin board systems possess "physical" features outlined in written descriptions, but this doesn't necessarily have the same effect that being in a room with a person or at an amusement park or in a classroom will have. After all, Internet users are still just sitting in their homes, offices or computer clusters. The environment they are in is nearly entirely constructed in their minds, resulting in a different

effect.

As discussed above, this environment lacks visual cues with body language such as posture, facial expression, eye contact, distance, gesture or appearance, as well as non-verbal cues voice cannot convey sarcasm, sorrow, caring, anger, or other emotions through ASCII characters on a computer monitor.

But perhaps most importantly in considering a romantic relationship, there is no sense of touch. In real life, romance is accompanied by physicality. It can be something as simple as a kiss on the cheek or as complex as sexual intercourse. But on the Net, even the most poetic person cannot express in words the comfort and solace a genuine hug can bring to a person who is hurt or sad. The greatest writer cannot set someone aflame with a computer \*smooch\*, \*kiss\*, or even \*deep kiss\*. Holding hands, tickling, poking, and other affectionate actions (and not-so-affectionate acts like \*tslap\*, \*thwap\*, or \*bop\*), though they take place constantly on the Net, can never come close to actual interaction. Victoria misses this physical aspect. "The down side is you can't give that person a hug when you know he is having a bad day. "There's no kissing him good bye before you go to bed," she lamented.

People tend to overcompensate for the lack of these dimensions usually found in real life situations. For instance, it has been noted that people use informal and expressive language and familiar slang to diminish the "indifferent social relationship created by a computer connection." Also, one study concluded that 60 percent of the messages sent by electronic mail wouldn't have been ventured otherwise. Such emotional outpourings are thought to compensate for the incompleteness of computer contact (Chesebro 118).

Vanguard, on Prism BBS, pinpoints this as a major factor in the evolution of relationships on the Net. "I'd say it has something to do with false intimacy being close to someone's thoughts and feelings here makes you forget that there's a physical life too." Chesebro and Bonsall have found that "computer-human interactions restrict access to the full range of communicative insights possible in face-to-face communication. The technology of the computer scarcely allows analogic, relativistic, symbolic, and anecdotal communication." Experts have cited that computer-human communication is heavily content-oriented which limits the development of "truly human relational behavior" (Chesebro 119).

Critics argue that computerized interactions displace the uniqueness and humanity of other more traditional ways of communicating. Samuel Gulino, a computer communications researcher, stated "We ought to recognize that computers have the capacity to virtually dehumanize society" (Chesebro 120).

Though this may be true of the future, I strongly doubt that computer relationships are anywhere close to displacing real face-to-face interaction. I state this confidently citing the stories the BBS users have contributed. In all cases, relationships they had founded on the Net progressed to more traditional forms with time. Merlin expresses that need for contact:

*There is a point i guess, where you no longer can stand it, you move to the phone. . .at least there, you can hear their voice.. and hearing their voice is just soo much more, i think it's almost like a progression.. from talk->phone-> meeting.*

He demonstrates that relationships sustained through the Net take more effort:

They take a bit more work especially on the communication part. . . they take a lot more money, people could tell you about their outrageous phone bills . . . they take time and dedication, and they take trust. In actuality, they're pretty close to normal real life relationships . . . the only difference is that while you may be doing 100%/O in rl, it may take a little more, like 150% because it's a net-relationship.

But that, in the end, it may be worth the effort because those involved may find that they are in the middle of a new, more traditional face-to-face relationship, at least upon occasion. Merlin has indicated that he knows at least one couple who have gotten married that met on the Internet. He believes this transition from computer communication to human interaction is inevitable if there are true feelings between those involved.

*In actuality, i would think most net-relationships will try and do turn into attempted real-life relationships because the two people will sooner or later want to meet each other. . .and when they do, it either turns into an LDR, fails,*

or who knows ?

Vanguard is currently pursuing a new romance. He met Emily through Prism BBS where they would chat whenever they ran into each other. Finally, after months of constant dialogue, he ventured to New York City to meet her. Since then, they have been together many times.

*With Emily, I'd "known" her for a few months before even meeting her, and after spending a couple days together we just fell into the romantic aspect. . . She and I have been together for a month now, and I can help but see being with her for a very long time. It is pretty magical; I mean, we have an amazing amount in common, and we relate to each other and understand each other in ways that I wouldn't have ever expected.*

Indeed, friendships blossom by the thousands on the Net. People talking, exchanging ideas, laughing, teasing, challenging constantly without ever meeting. Some of these computer companionships take on an element not found in other friendships. Attraction builds and so does the desire to move to another mode of communication. Introduce romance to a net friendship and suddenly the computer's restrictive method of communication cannot convey the feelings inside of or fulfill the desires felt by the net couples. Emotion is lost in the characterless type and imprecise words, whispers cannot be distinguished from sobs, users are forced to define themselves to others; there is no sight, no smell, no touch.

This can only lead to the conclusion there is an identifiable difference between face-to-face contact between love interests and interaction between couples on the Net. I believe, and much of my first-person research demonstrates, that due to the constraints of the network environment, true romantic relationships, as defined by real life standards, cannot exist solely within the confines of the Net. The networks may be a good way of locating someone who shares similar interests and goals and permit the opportunity to get to know other people, but a relationship must move forward and make use of other modes of communication if a romance is going to be sustained.

True, some users will claim vehemently that they have a successful net relationship, but it is my prediction that it will either continue until it reaches a point at which those involved desire closer interaction through other channels of communication, or it dissipates from lack of fuel, if you will, to feed the fires of love and passion. Or perhaps, as Chesebro and Bonsall suggest, there needs to be a new definition of romance created that allows for virtual love between two people separated by time and distance.

And what of Singen and Achilles, our introductory couple? They are about to embark upon another important step toward establishing a real life (though possibly long distance) relationship; the two have plans to meet later this month. In the meantime, all is not perfect between the two of them. Singen is experiencing many of the concerns that accompany an intense net relationship.

*I'm still really worried about the fact that I've become so attached to him, but he assures me that the feeling is mutual and that it could potentially work out if we're both patient. We've become so close, and I'm getting a little worried. I tend to be over-sensitive to things he says because it's hard to interpret what he means just by reading his messages. It's hard not knowing what's going on with him. Jealousy is a problem too (for me). He's very popular and is in fraternity and has a lot of girlfriends. He says he's only interested in me, but I can't help feeling a little weird. I realize that I can't expect him to give up someone there for me, but I just wish he were here so I wouldn't have to worry so much.*

It's May now. The moment of truth will soon arrive for these two net lovers. Soon Singen will know if she has much to look forward to as Vanguard and Merlin or if her eyes will be opened to the truth as Victoria's were. In the meantime, thousands of burgeoning romances are being played out in cyberspace. Enter with caution. A whole new world awaits.

## Works Cited

Chidley, Joe. "Love Connection." *Maclean's* 17 January 1994: 45.

Chesebro, James W., and Donald G. Bonsall. *Computer Mediated Communication: Human Relationships in a Computerized World*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1989.

- Cooke, Kevin, and Dan Lehrer. "The Whole World is Talking." *The Nation* 12 July 1993:61-64.
- Dern, Daniel P. "Applying the Internet." *Byte* February 1992: 118.
- Dern, Daniel P. "Under Construction: Information Superhighway." *Home Office Computing* August 1993: 36-37.
- Fogel, Alan. *Developing Through Relationships: Origins of Communication, Self and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- Fraase, Michael. *The Mac Internet Tour Guide: Cruising the Internet the Easy Way*. Chapel Hill, NC: Ventura Press, 1993.
- LaQuey, Tracy. *The Internet Companion*. Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1993.
- Lewis, Peter H. "First-time Tourists Needs a Pocket Guide to Downtown Internet." *The News York Times* 5 April 1994.
- Marsh, Peter. *Eye to Eye: How People Interact*. Topsfield, Mass: Salem House Publishers, 1988.
- Nichols, Mark. "Inside Internet." *Maclean's* 17 January 1994: 45.
- Rawlins, William K. *Friendship Matters: Communications, Dialectics, and the Life Curse*. New York: Aldine DeGruyter, 1992.
- Sussman, Vic. "Communicating in the New Age." *U.S. News World Report* 23 November 1992: 92-93.

## contributors

[Amy Appleby](#), '96, majors in Public Relations and Marketing and comes from Wuerzburg, Germany. She is a member of the Alpha Phi sorority, Mu Kappa Tau ( the honor society for marketing majors) and the Public Relations Society of America. She is a golden key member of the National Honor Society and recipient of the Retired Officer's Association Scholarship. In addition, she is an avid down hill skier and enjoys traveling.

[Benjamin Blacker](#) , '98, from Newton, Massachusetts wrote his ethnography for Vic Taylor's WRT 105 class. His interests include coffee, cigarettes, and movies.

[Patricia Cowden](#), is a U.C. student leaning towards a degree in IST. She currently is an administrative assistant in Planned Giving for the Office of Development. Her household includes her husband Richard, three cats and a dog. Her hobbies include classical guitar, cross-country skiing, rollerblading, and unicycling. Her award winning personal essay was written for Chris Madden's 105 class.

[Amye Hommel](#) , '98, is a psychology major from Deer Park, New York. She is a member of the Student Government Association and La L.U.C.H.A., as well as an editor of *Intertext* magazine. She wrote her essay for Jeanette Jeneault's WRT 105 class.

[Amy Meadows](#), '96, majors in Broadcast Journalism and Psychology and comes from Dewitt. She works part-time for WMHR 102.9 on the air. She was the winner of the Eric Trust Award for promoting among other things racial tolerance in the community. She wrote her autobiographical essay for Amanda Brown's 305 studio class.

[Cheryl L. Stafford](#), '96, is an Advertising/Marketing major from Perkiomenville, Pennsylvania currently studying at the Syracuse University London Centre. Her activities include being Public Affairs Director at WERW, on the editorial board of the School of Management Undergraduate Journal. She is also a University 100 tour guide and a member of the University Union Concert and Cinema Boards. She wrote her award winning piece for Henri Jankiewicz's 209 class.

[Elaine Sylvester](#), '94 , majored in Psychology and minored in African-American Studies. She was a member of the local chapter of the NAACP and the SAS. She is presently employed in the Social Work field. She wrote her researched essay for Diana Penrod's 305 class.

[Sam Szuck](#), the upper division award winner this year comes from Liverpool. He takes courses at University College as well as being matriculated in the Creative Writing department at SUNY Binghamton. He works for Onondaga ARC, but he prefers his creative writing to all other activities. He wrote his piece for Jane Oberg's 305 class.

## contributors

[Amy Appleby](#), '96, majors in Public Relations and Marketing and comes from Wuerzburg, Germany. She is a member of the Alpha Phi sorority, Mu Kappa Tau ( the honor society for marketing majors) and the Public Relations Society of America. She is a golden key member of the National Honor Society and recipient of the Retired Officer's Association Scholarship. In addition, she is an avid down hill skier and enjoys traveling.

[Benjamin Blacker](#) , '98, from Newton, Massachusetts wrote his ethnography for Vic Taylor's WRT 105 class. His interests include coffee, cigarettes, and movies.

[Patricia Cowden](#), is a U.C. student leaning towards a degree in IST. She currently is an administrative assistant in Planned Giving for the Office of Development. Her household includes her husband Richard, three cats and a dog. Her hobbies include classical guitar, cross-country skiing, rollerblading, and unicycling. Her award winning personal essay was written for Chris Madden's 105 class.

[Amye Hommel](#) , '98, is a psychology major from Deer Park, New York. She is a member of the Student Government Association and La L.U.C.H.A., as well as an editor of *Intertext* magazine. She wrote her essay for Jeanette Jeneault's WRT 105 class.

[Amy Meadows](#), '96, majors in Broadcast Journalism and Psychology and comes from Dewitt. She works part-time for WMHR 102.9 on the air. She was the winner of the Eric Trust Award for promoting among other things racial tolerance in the community. She wrote her autobiographical essay for Amanda Brown's 305 studio class.

[Cheryl L. Stafford](#), '96, is an Advertising/Marketing major from Perkiomenville, Pennsylvania currently studying at the Syracuse University London Centre. Her activities include being Public Affairs Director at WERW, on the editorial board of the School of Management Undergraduate Journal. She is also a University 100 tour guide and a member of the University Union Concert and Cinema Boards. She wrote her award winning piece for Henri Jankiewicz's 209 class.

[Elaine Sylvester](#), '94 , majored in Psychology and minored in African-American Studies. She was a member of the local chapter of the NAACP and the SAS. She is presently employed in the Social Work field. She wrote her researched essay for Diana Penrod's 305 class.

[Sam Szuck](#), the upper division award winner this year comes from Liverpool. He takes courses at University College as well as being matriculated in the Creative Writing department at SUNY Binghamton. He works for Onondaga ARC, but he prefers his creative writing to all other activities. He wrote his piece for Jane Oberg's 305 class.



## editors

**Amye Hommel**, '98, is from Deer park, New York, majoring in Psychology. In high school, she was the activities editor of her Yearbook. Amye is a member of the Student Government Association and L.A. L.U.C.H.A. (Latino Undergraduates Creating History in America).

**Allison M. Rao**, '95, is from Providence, Rhode Island, majoring in Political Science with a focus in Writing. She is a Peer Writing Consultant in the Writing Program, and a member of Sigma Kappa sorority. Allison plans to work in magazine or book publishing, and continue her education in graduate school for Creative Writing.

**Jonathan B. Shablak**, '95, is from Fayetteville, New York, majoring in English and Textual Studies with a focus in Writing. Brett is a member of the Delta Kappa Epsilon International Fraternity, and also a member of the Greek Council. He also works in the Writing Department as a peer consultant.

**Deborah R. Silver**, '95, is from Framingham , Massachusetts, majoring in Speech Communication with a focus in Writing. Published in the Spring 1994 edition of *Intertext*, Debbie is a member of the Peer Sexuality Program, the Alpha Gamma Delta sorority, and the Greek Judicial Board. She is also a peer consultant in the Writing Program.

**Stephanie R. Stevenson**, '95, is from Cheyenne, Wyoming, majoring in English and Textual Studies. She is involved in tutoring students through the S.C.A.L.E. Program. She plans to continue her education in graduate school with a concentration in print/publications and writing.

**Debra Paige Yelen**, '97, is from Kingston, Pennsylvania, majoring in Communications Design with a concentration in Art Photography. She was the editor of her high school yearbook, and plans to continue using her experience in publications and the visual arts.